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#3

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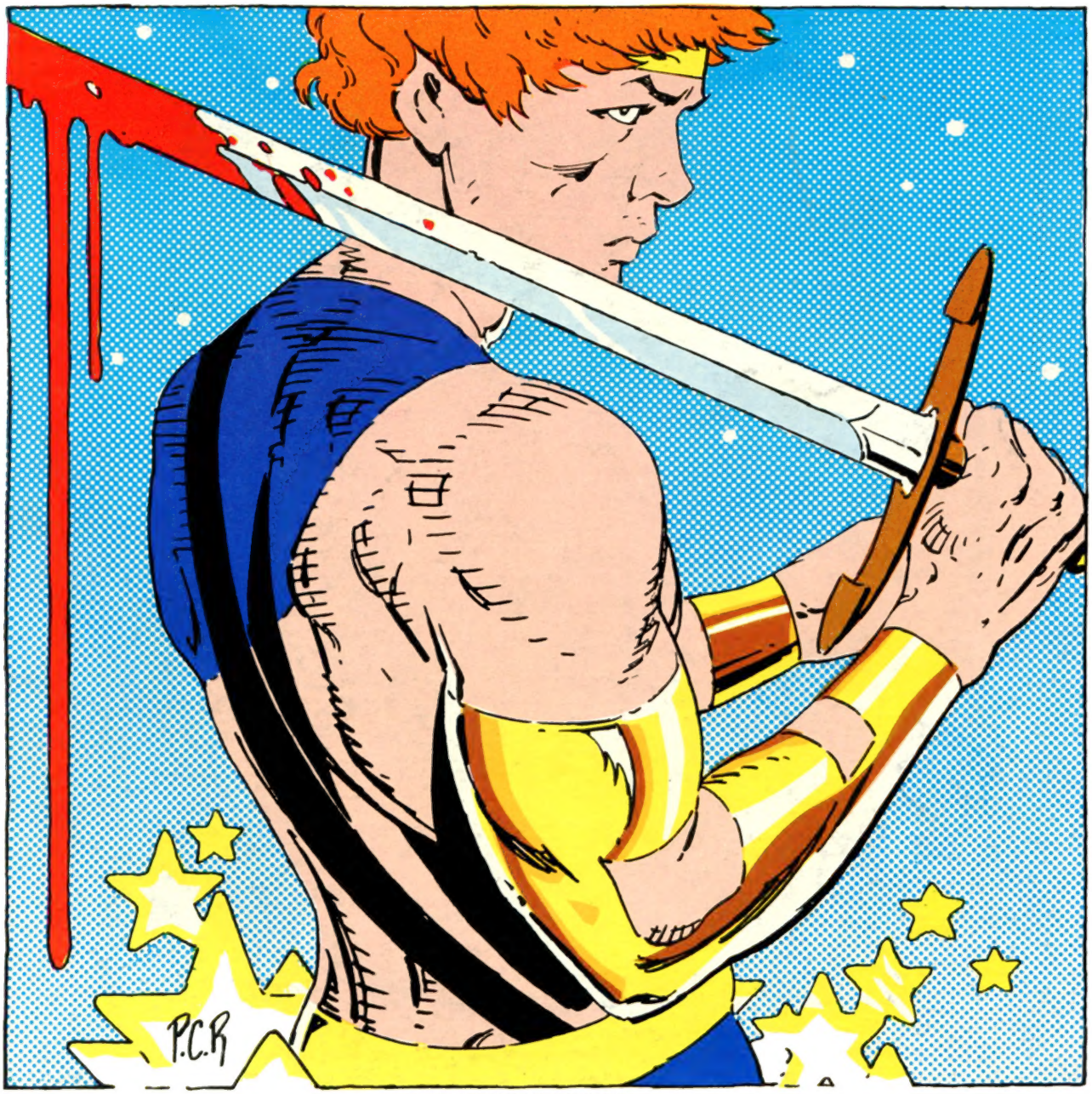

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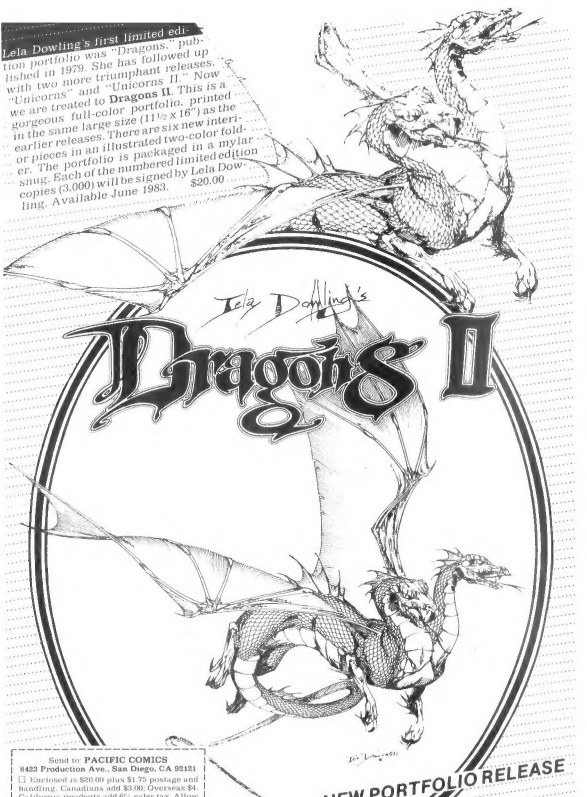

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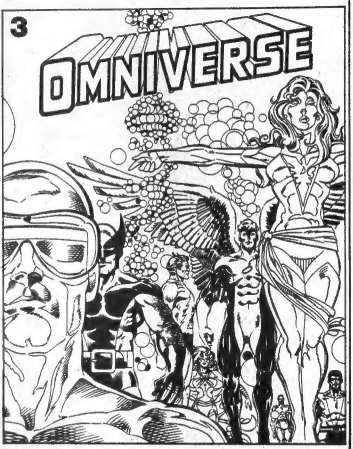

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art and colors

RON FONTES
repo

thanks for the gracious gift

Art: Jim Salicrup

UP FRONT

You all recognize the names of such comics pros as **Mark Gruenwald, Jim Salicrup** and **Steve Gerber** — who have conducted interviews and lent helping hands on our first few issues — but I want to take the time now to tell you about some of the other stalwarts on the COMICS INTERVIEW staff whom you may not know as well.

Ron Fontes comes to us by way of Western Comics. Before that, he was art director for a big-time ad agency. These days, Ron designs by day for **Sol Brodsky** as production coordinator of Marvel Books — and by night for my favorite magazine, COMICS INTERVIEW.

Steve Ringgenberg is fresh from a stint at Fantagraphics as editor of AMAZING HEROES and interviewer for COMICS JOURNAL. Steve is already storming comicdom, scripting for Marvel, DC and Red Circle — you're sure to be seeing his name here, there and everywhere in the months to come.

Mitch Cohn's name may also be familiar to many of you from the fine editing and interviewing work he's done for the FANTACO CHRONICLES, among various other projects. He'll continue contributing to COMICS INTERVIEW in the months to come, too.

And I can't thank **Lesley Benjamin-Aull** enough for her help with almost every aspect of producing this issue —including but not limited to her accounting acumen and scheduling aid.

Of course, there are also more — many more — who contribute to the creation of this magazine. I've benefited from the advice and good will of practically every single comic professional, no matter what aspect of the field **each** is involved in —from creative to business and back again.

The amount of effort it takes to put together a first-class magazine is staggering — but that hasn't stopped any of the people who have pitched in so unstintingly. The COMICS INTERVIEW crew is committed to producing the best possible publication about comics, and I'm lucky indeed to have such a talented and devoted team.

Thanks to each and every one — and to all of you out there, too, for making COMICS INTERVIEW successful enough to go monthly with this issue!

David

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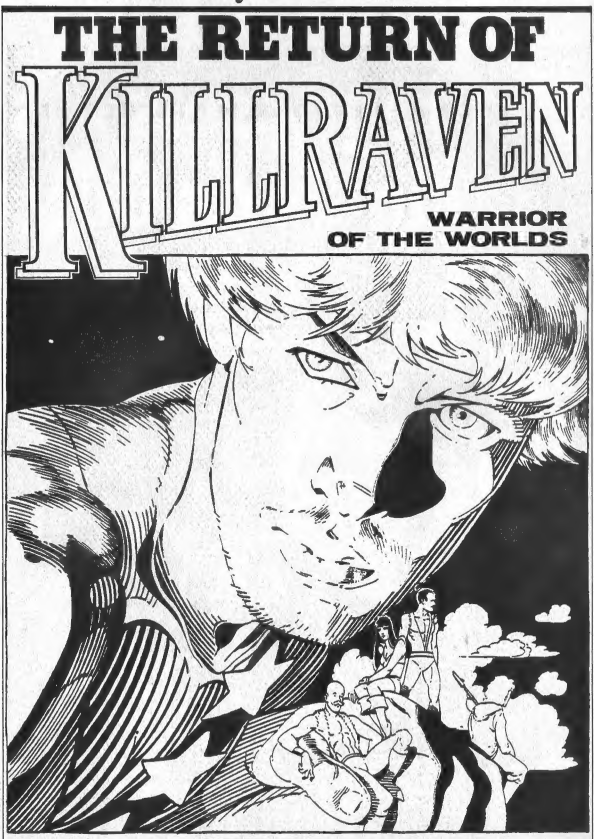

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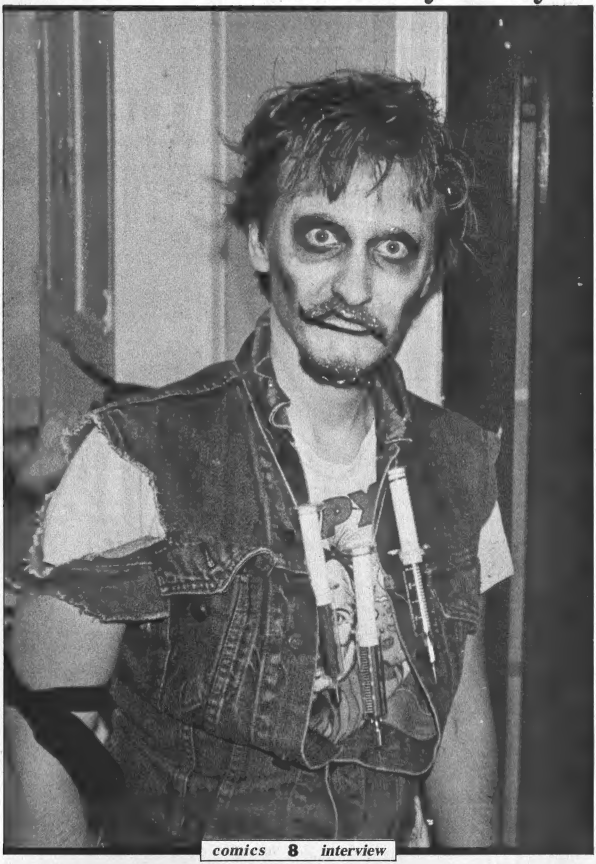
"Killraven has extra-sensory ability to



counter-balance his gladiatorial skills."

P. CRAIG RUSSELL

It was his vividly realized fantasy on Marvel's Killraven series that first made me aware of Craig Russell's artistry.

Craig's tenure on Killraven began with issue #27 of AMAZING ADVENTURES, picking up where Neal Adams, Howard Chaykin and Herb Trimpe had left off. Russell made Killraven uniquely his own, with a visual style that blended such diverse influences as Berry Windson-Smith, art nouveau, Gustave Moreau, and a whole host of Symbolist and Romantic painters. Craig's steady artistic progression on Killraven was cut short by the cancellation of AMAZING ADVENTURES, after a run that many fans felt was entirely too short.

I first met Craig in 1976 at the San Diego Comic Con. I still treasure the drawing of Conan I purchased from him, for the care and meticulous attention to detail that he lavished on a simple sketch. (He even touched up Steve Oliff's already nice coloring, adding highlights and tones.) That same kind of care is visible in everything Craig does, from his wordless Symbolist fantasies to the new KILLRAVEN graphic novel he's done for Marvel Comics . . .

STEVE RINGGENBERG: *How does it feel to be working on KILLRAVEN after a six year hiatus?*

P. CRAIG RUSSELL: Pretty good. I enjoyed the challenge, which is one of the main reasons I decided to do it when **Don McGregor** approached me with the idea of returning to KILLRAVEN. The first thing to come to mind was how I would do it in comparison to what I'd done before.

STEVE: *How do you look back on the work you did then?*

CRAIG: With a very critical eye. There are certain things I like about it, but other things seem so glaringly off — especially in anatomy, which is what I've been working on a lot in the last few years. Also, there were certain things — especially mechanical objects, such as the tripods and the High Overlord's bio-mechanical armor

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: P. Craig Russell
Occupation: Freelance Illustrator and Comics Artist
Residence: Kent, Ohio
Born: Wellesville, Ohio — the 13th Anniversary of the War Of Worlds Broadcast, 1951.

Credits: WAR OF THE WORLDS, DOCTOR STRANGE ANNUAL #1, ANT-MAN, PARSIFAL; various portfolios and illustrated Symbolist fantasies have appeared in EPIC, NIGHT MUSIC, Star* Reach's IMAGINE, etc.

Training: I got a B.F.A. in Painting from the University of Cincinnati, and spent six months working with Dan Adkins in his studio in Ohio, and he basically got me into the business.

Favorite Quote: "Anyone is resting to say that the time which is not reverberating is acting in partaking." — Gertrude Stein.

Favorite Film That Everyone Else Hated: Bertolucci's LUNA

Favorite Outre Comic: Linda Barry's GIRLS & BOYS

Favorite Award: Aside from any given to me, that is, is one I'm instituting, called the All White Babies Are Pigs Award, for excessive statements made by critics, fans or artists (example: "Burne Hogarth is an incompetent hack" or "the only real comics are superhero comics").

Favorite President: Nixon. Even when he quits, he won't quit. He makes J.R. Ewing look like a pickpocket. I hear he's going to have a TV show — I love it, I just love it.

Unrealized Ambition: Over the years, I've dreamt every so often of facing a rack of Archie comics. There are all sorts of new and unusual titles, and I can't wait to pick them up. Sometimes I even dream that I'm drawing an Archie comic — but in my own style. An unrealized ambition is to draw Jughead.

"Don McGregor had to practically strong-

— which I had inherited, already designed and drawn, and I was never really satisfied by the way they had been done. Before, I'd had no new ideas for them, but now I do, so I had a chance to rework them in ways that I wanted to see.

STEVE: *What about the Martians?*

CRAIG: They used to look like Mr. Potato Head. (*Laughter.*) They're a lot gloppier now. And I gave Killraven a haircut. Same costume, though.

STEVE: *Wasn't KILLRAVEN originally planned to return as a serial for EPIC?*

CRAIG: Yes. And by the time I finished adapting Don's script it was in four parts. The advantage of working with EPIC is that we weren't restricted to a set number of pages, which was always a problem with the old KILLRAVEN series. We had, say, 17 pages, and if we wanted even one more, we'd have to cut the letters page. Now we've had the freedom to play around and expand the story. Because when I got the final script from Don, it was about 36 pages. By the time I finished adapting it, it was up to 55, with the same script. I just took certain passages, and used two pages instead of one, which gave me a chance to open out the artwork, and let it breathe a bit.

STEVE: *How much freedom do you have in interpreting Don's scripts?*

CRAIG: I stick right to the script. The design and pacing is pretty much up to me. Don has no complaints if I do in two pages what he's written in one, because it usually helps the book.

STEVE: *When did you decide to make KILLRAVEN a graphic novel, instead of serializing it?*

CRAIG: Actually, **Archie Goodwin** asked me if I would be interested, so we added some introductory pages to recap the series and re-introduce the characters — basically letting the readers know where they were at the beginning of the story in relation to the old series.

STEVE: *Is the graphic novel a direct continuation of the old series' storyline?*

CRAIG: Yes, it picks up right where we left off, in the same area and on the same quest, maybe a few days later. Don always had a very strong structure worked out several years in advance, but when he didn't think he'd be doing KILLRAVEN again, he used some of the ideas and settings in his other stories — such as the Disneyworld setting used in SABRE that was originally intended for KILLRAVEN. So, in some cases he had to think up different settings, but the storyline is pretty much the same as it was. I mean, this is what we would have been doing in '77 if the series hadn't been cancelled.

STEVE: *Are you happy that you had a chance to go back and finish up the series?*

CRAIG: Oh, yeah. It's fun to tie off some of the ends, because it was very loose. There were a lot of plots going on. This doesn't tie off the old series entirely, just certain aspects of it. In Don's manner, though, he's left a few new threads hanging out there at the end of this one — including one great big thread. But I can't say what it is.

STEVE: *Are you bringing back M'Shulla and Old Skull?*

CRAIG: M'Shulla, Old Skull, Carmilla — they're all there, plus two new characters who are integral to this particular story.

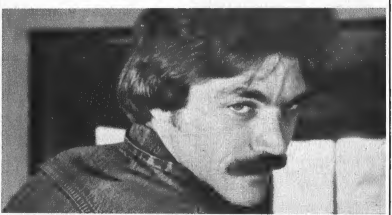
STEVE: *Is Killraven your favorite character, of all the ones you've worked on?*

CRAIG: Yes. He's the most heroic. Elric is the complete opposite of Killraven, in many ways — and, in other ways, he's not. Elric is sophisticated and knowledgeable, while Killraven is in many ways quite naive. Killraven is very much an American character. But they both possess great extra-mental abilities.

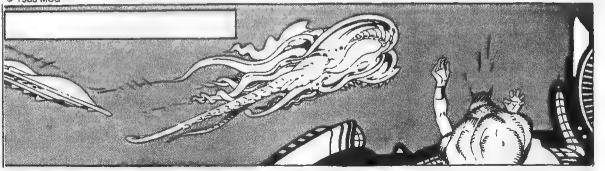
STEVE: *I find that all your heroes have an otherworldly quality — maybe not as they're written, but more in your visual interpretation. You can see it in their eyes.*

CRAIG: Well, good. KILLRAVEN has a sort of extra-sensory ability to counterbalance his gladiatorial skills. He is very much the barbarian type, yet at the same time he has this seed planted in his brain that is the history of the human race —a racial memory of everything that has been obliterated by the Martians. It's almost

Snapshot of the model who posed as Old Skull . . .



arm me into inking my own work!"



On the left: Martians as they appeared in AMAZING ADVENTURES #30, looking "like Mr. Potato Head." Above: Martians as they appear — "a lot gloppier now" — in the new KILLRAVEN graphic novel.

a magical ability, and that's what I keyed into immediately, and had fun visualizing. It's something I always tried to bring out in the character. It was what removed him from being just another sword-wielding gladiator type. I like the very physical aspect of it, but I also like bringing out his mental abilities. It's the sort of things I always responded to in DOCTOR STRANGE. And I try to bring it out especially in this one, "The Last Dream's Broken." There's a lot of physical violence, but it is Killraven's mental ability that proves to be the pivotal point in the story.

STEVE: *Did you draw the KILLRAVEN graphic novel in the same style as your other comics work, or did you take more of an illustrative approach to the story-telling?*

CRAIG: I think my storytelling approach remains basically the same, no matter what I do. I go for as clear an interpretation of the writer's viewpoint as I can, while trying to maintain a flow between the pictures. That remains standard. The only time I really deviate from that is when I do one of my Symbolist fantasies. I've done four of those so far. The last one was "Isolation and Illusion." There is a different visual sense to those. But any of the series, like ELRIC or KILLRAVEN, are fairly consistent in approach. What is different in this one is that there's maybe a rougher edge to the drawing. It's possibly closer in visual style to the very last issue of KILLRAVEN that I did. It's in the inking. I use fewer lines in a wider space, but more textures in the background. Whether implicitly or explicity, I always got the feeling from **Dan Adkins** that I could never learn to ink because I couldn't handle a brush. **Don McGregor** had to practically strong-arm me into trying it on WAR OF THE WORLDS. He had to talk me into inking my own work!

STEVE: *Did you color the graphic novel yourself?*

CRAIG: No. I made color notes and got ahold of **Petra Goldberg**, who did the coloring. On the original series, I only colored a couple of issues, and then I did coloring notes for a number of others. I always tried to get Petra because she was able to follow the notes, and everything she did on her own was always of the highest quality. She was the first one I thought of when I realized I wouldn't be able to do all that coloring. Petra also colored the **Sandy Plunkett** Doctor Strange story that I inked for MARVEL FANFARE.

STEVE: *You also inked Carmine Infantino on a Doctor Strange story for MARVEL FANFARE.*

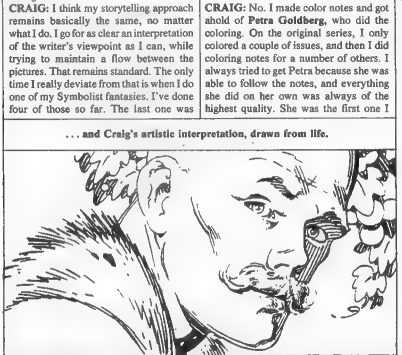
CRAIG: Yes, and it's really stinko. I did it about five years ago. It's been in inventory that long. If I was doing it today, it would be a lot different. I'm inking **Gil Kane** on that **Rudyard Kipling** JUNGLE BOOK series for MARVEL FANFARE, and I'm a lot happier with with that.

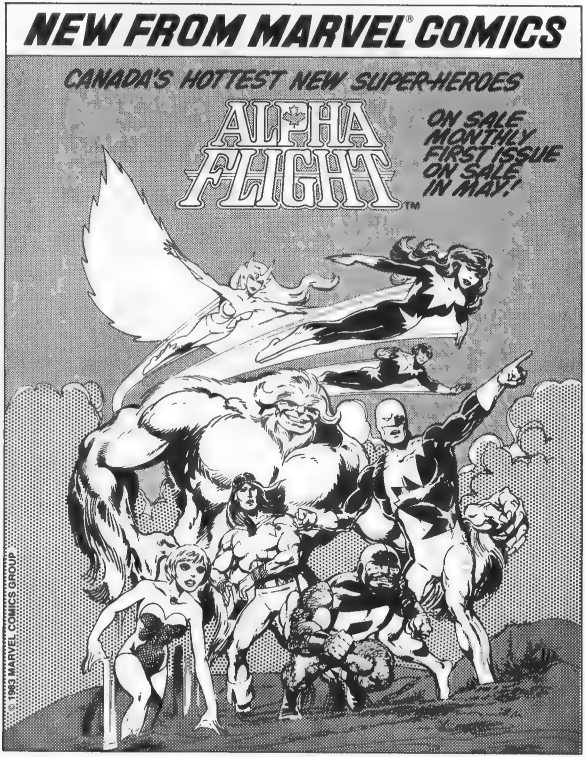
STEVE: *With all the things you are doing, like ELRIC and KILLRAVEN, why do you take time to ink other people's work?*

CRAIG: I enjoy it. I really do. If I had to do it constantly, I don't know if I would, but since about '78, I've been inking people here and there. I've been able to play around with a real variety and range of artists. It's a nice break for me between drawing. Inking is almost like time off to me. It's a real skill, a real craft to develop, but it's not as mentally draining as starting out with a blank page, which is the real challenge.

And now I'm inking **Michael Gilbert** on the ELRIC book. He moved up here to Kent, Ohio. He was living down in Austin, Texas, and now he's living right across town, five minutes away. He comes over here almost every night, and we work in the same studio, passing the pages back and forth. Mostly, I'm doing a combination of breakdown and layout, and he's doing all the pencilling, and I'm inking that. He's a totally different artist from anyone else I've been inking. And there's a challenge there. **Gilbert's** is a much more morbid looking Elric than what I do. He's also much looser than I am as a penciller — more painterly, more like **Will Elsner.** With **Gilbert's** work, there's a "creepier" feel

. . . and Craig's artistic interpretation, drawn from life.

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"Elric is the complete opposite of Killraven."

to the whole story. If you want to compare studio styles, I play **Lou Fine** to his **Will Eisner.**

STEVE: *But, since you're inking it, you're putting a veneer of your style over his, right?*

CRAIG: Well, we're trying to keep it consistent with the ELRIC books that I've already done, but by the second one, our styles are meshing a bit more — more of his is coming through.

STEVE: *Is ELRIC going to be a regular series, or a mini-series?*

CRAIG: Right now, we're projecting six bi-monthly issues. We're doing the first Elric novel, taking it straight from **Michael Moorcock.**

STEVE: *Are you a Moorcock fan?*

CRAIG: Until **Mike Friedrich** approached me with the idea of doing an Elric graphic novel, I hadn't read **Moorcock.** I started reading the Elric books and could see why people had said for years that I should. I read very little fantasy. That may seem odd, because obviously fantasy is what I'm most interested in. I read a lot of fantasy when I was a teenager, but about the time I started working in comics and got involved in producing fantasy eight hours a day, I started losing my interest. I do read a lot, though. I'm reading **Mark Twain** right now, and a couple of months ago I was reading everything by **Joan Didion** that I could get my hands on, and **Dostoevsky** before that — anything to get away from fantasy, although I still read it once in a while. I've been reading some **George MacDonald,** which was just fantastic.

STEVE: *Which painters and illustrators have influenced you?*

CRAIG: I've learned from about everyone I've seen. Every time I look at someone, I see something different. Different periods of art, which at one time might have looked boring to me, like Medieval art, are now very exciting; or Byzantine art, which just looked stiff to me before, now has a completely different meaning. But the artists who've had the most influence on my work are the 19th Century painters, the French and Belgian Symbolists, the German Symbolists. **Gustave Moreau** — absolutely. The Pre-Raphaelites, and through them back into the Medieval painters. But most anything I see that I get excited about —**Rembrandt, Dubrer, Raphael** — I'm sure something sinks in just from looking at them. A lot of my earlier work was influenced by **Barry Smith,** and we were both drawing on a lot of the Romantic painters and Pre-Raphaelites. I was highly enamored of **Barry Smith's** work, and still am.

STEVE: *When you consider that you've done the "Ring" portfolio, and Siegfried, and Parsifal, one might conclude opera has been a big influence on you — especially Wagner.*

CRAIG: Definitely. I've been a fan of **Wagner** since high school. The sort of heroic-fantasy comics I do are very much like Wagnerian opera — heroic gestures, "larger than life" characters, all the exotic trappings and settings. I've learned a lot about drama and characterization from opera. Because whenever a character is speaking, the music is defining and supporting his character, in the same way that visual images define a character in comics. And I've gotten a lot of ideas about dramatizing situations from opera.

I think you'll find that most comic artists are heavy music listeners no matter what style of music they like. Usually, it's rock. I'm sure the response of the rock fans to rock music is just as intense as mine to opera, although I think opera has a little more to say to a comics artist, because it's dealing directly with what we're doing — conveying very big emotions in a hybrid form . . . in our case, words and pictures. The characterization is on a more subtle plane in opera, if I may wax chauvanistic. Opera continues to be a big influence on my work.

STEVE: *Did you listen to Wagner when you did the Wagner portfolio?*

CRAIG: Yes. I listened to a lot of **Wagner,** and **Richard Strauss.** I listen to opera when I work. **Michael Gilbert,** my collaborator on ELRIC, has had to put up with that, but now — brace yourself — he's got me into **Elvis Costello,** and **Randy Newman.** I also like 16th Century Japanese court music — but I haven't inflicted that on him yet.

STEVE: *Are you into Gustav Mahler at all?*

CRAIG: I used to listen to that all the time, back in college. **Bob Schaeffer** told me that years ago he visited friends who were listening to *all* the **Mahler** symphonies in one day. One vast canvas of

"When people talk about the Marvel Age of

This page: The Overlord as drawn by Craig in AMAZING ADVENTURES #30. Opposite page: The new improved Overlord model for '83.

© 1975 MCG

sound after another. In the middle of this madness, he was handed a copy of the DR. STRANGE ANNUAL #1. I was listening to **Mahler** much of the time I was drawing it, so I was tickled that he should come to it in such an appropriately over-indulgent scene.

STEVE: *Besides opera, what other aspects of culture have influenced you?*

CRAIG: Film, in a big way. I used to see a lot of foreign films when I lived in New York — **Godard, Truffaut, Antonioni** — because I loved the subtitles. I really had to watch the movies and read the words. It was like a giant comic book that moved. I found myself responding to these foreign movies more visually than I did the English-speaking ones. I would go see a foreign-language film and come back all excited and do layouts on KILLRAVEN. So, as far as layouts and the progression of images, and continuity, I learned from films.

STEVE: *As far as comics go, is there anyone you're looking at these days?*

CRAIG: Michael Golden is always excellent. And I follow **Dave Sim's** work every month in CEREBUS. It's intelligent. You get political satire that is extremely relevant without being the slightest bit preachy. I get tired very quickly of "relevant" comics. It's a tricky business because I certainly believe that you should say something — make a statement — but it's a real art to do it gracefully, in almost a concealed way. I also like **George Freeman's** work.

STEVE: *If you're not entertaining, then you're not going to get your message across. It's not that a lot of comics don't have a message, it's that they're not entertaining.*

CRAIG: There have always been a lot of crappy comics out there. The past looks brighter because you only remember the best things that came out. You aren't seeing the tons of ridiculous things that came out in 1949 and 1959 and 1969. Whenever people talk about the "Marvel Age of Comics," no one thinks about the RAWHIDE KID.

STEVE: *Do you follow any European cartoonists?*

CRAIG: I love THE SURVIVORS, by **Hermann.** Really exciting. I like his sense of layout, especially. I just picked it up and haven't read it yet, I've been so caught up in the pictures. I've spent a lot of time looking at **Guido Crepax**, and **Moebius**, of course.

STEVE: *Do you do much life-drawing?*

CRAIG: From time to time. It gets expensive to do all the drawing from life. First, I work out thumbnail sketches with stick figures, so I know exactly what I

Comics no one thinks about RAWHIDE KID."

want. Then, I bring in a model. A lot of the poses, such as flying and jumping and falling down and so forth, a person couldn't possibly hold for more than thirty seconds. I take photos for those, and use them for later reference. Actually, it's been about a year now since I've drawn from life. It's curious that you should mention it, because I've recently been thinking about having a go at it again. I have a couple of large sketchbooks filled with life studies. Half of my working time in 1979 and 1980 was spent in life drawing.

STEVE: *A lot of comics artists draw from the work of other artists, but not from life . . .*

CRAIG: Yeah. A lot have drawn from **Hal Foster,** and it doesn't really show, because he's so correct in a classical way that you can get away with it. A lot of the EC artists recycled **Foster.** But if you swipe from **Jack Kirby,** it's almost impossible to really put your own style into it. The same with **Gil Kane.** Because both are so stylized already and their styles are so evident.

When I was first doing KILLRAVEN, people noticed all the **Barry Smith** influence, but the bigger influence was **John Buscema.** Figure after figure was taken right from **Buscema,** at least in the first few issues of WAR OF THE WORLDS. People notice it when you're influenced by **Neal Adams** or **Barry Smith,** but the thing with **Buscema** is that although he's stylized, he's not too strongly stylized. It worked to a certain point, you know, added a certain veneer of professionalism. I started working with the figure about the second half of the KILLRAVEN series, and for a while you can see **Buscema** figures and real-life figures right next to each other. But drawing from life gave more humanity to the second half of the series than was there in the first half, at least visually.

STEVE: *In some of the earlier issues, you had Jack Abel working with you, and in issue #30, Abel, Trimpe, Charlamonte and Adkins were all listed beside you as artists. Was that because of deadline problems?*

CRAIG: Let's see, which issue was that?

STEVE: *"The Rebels of January and Beyond."*

CRAIG: Oh, that's the one where I did the six pin-up pages. Yeah, that was a book that was designed to give us a jump on the next one, because we were so late — then it took me almost as long to do the six pin-up pages!

STEVE: *Were you generally able to keep up with your deadlines?*

CRAIG: No. Back then, I was absolutely terrible with deadlines. I missed them right and left. I think the only reason I didn't get into trouble was because **Don McGregor** was always later than I was. No matter how late I was, he was later. The deadline could be two days away and I would have three pages done, but Don would only have *two* pages written, so I would say: "Well, hey, Don hasn't written up this far yet." ("Please, Mr. Troll, my brother's much tastier than I.") But we missed a number of deadlines that way, because there were several fill-in issues and then I did layouts for others. Now, I don't think I've missed a deadline since '77. I just don't do it. But I've gotten a lot more self-discipline since then. Also, with the way the field is now, you can set deadlines ahead of time, or get into projects that have an open-ended deadline.

STEVE: *Like the KILLRAVEN graphic novel . . .*

CRAIG: Right. I'd much rather have a project that I work on for several months or a year, than a real quick deadline. Although with ELRIC, this is the first time I've been into a regular series since KILLRAVEN in '76. We'll see what happens. We made the first deadline, anyhow. I work a lot steadier, now. I seem to get more done. I think it's something you just pick up with time. I've been doing comics for eleven years, now — it hardly seems like that long.

STEVE: *Besides the ELRIC adaptation for Pacific Comics, what else are you committed to do now?*

CRAIG: I'm doing a continued series for NATIONAL LAMPOON called "King of the Castle," written by **Sean Kelly** and **Ted Mann.** It's sort of a parody of PRINCE VALIANT, drawn in a fairly straight style, but a little looser than the other things I've worked on. It's fun to do. Sean and Ted's bizarre concepts make me chuckle.

I'm also working on a short story, a companion piece to "Isolation and Illusion," called "Ein Heldentraum" ("A Hero's Dream"). The script is by **Patrick Mason** — who scripted **PARSIFAL** — and it's adapted from **Hugo Wolf's** song setting of a poem by **Goethe.** (Why do I get the strange feeling that I don't belong in the 20th Century?)

STEVE: *Do you think you're going to continue doing comics in the future, or come to a point, like Barry Smith, where you say, "I don't want to do comics any longer, I've grown beyond that."*

CRAIG: I don't think there's such a thing as growing beyond it. You might reach a point where you've used up all your resources, or where the market won't support you, but if you've grown "beyond"

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McGREGOR: "It's a 50-some page story."

it, you've simply stopped asking questions. Or, you may grow in a different direction, finding you can say something with a single image that you can't with a succession of images. And that's perfectly valid. But you haven't "gone beyond it," you just moved to something else or in another direction. Batman, Smith has returned to comics with that story in EPIC that is as fine as anything he's ever done. It's really exciting to see.

You know, we tend to see things in series. We all — fans, artists, critics — are most impressed by what we see twelve times a year. The single piece is frequently lost. I have worked in series — like ELRIC and KILLRAVEN — but feel my best work is "Isolation and Illusion." It is the work in which I feel I've stretched the farthest, and the work in which I've used the form in a unique way. It is my signature piece. It's what my work is about.

STEVE: *How are the younger fans reacting to your work, the people who are just getting into comics now and may not have seen KILLRAVEN?*

CRAIG: The mail response to "Isolation and Illusion" in EPIC and the second Elric story, "When the Gods Laugh," was very positive. I don't do much "trading punches," so I guess the trading-punches audience wouldn't get too excited by my work. *Although* we have a bit of that in KILLRAVEN.

STEVE: *Is it violent?*

CRAIG: Well . . . they mix it up a bit.

STEVE: *How has the response been to your work that is overly Symbolist and obscure in the meanings? Are people getting the point?*

CRAIG: Some people are and some people aren't. Some people like to look at it for the pictures, and other people just become irritated that the meaning's not

DON McGREGOR says...

When **Archie Goodwin** asked me about doing a new KILLRAVEN story for EPIC magazine, I hadn't thought about doing the strip in five years. Some of the elements that I had been leading up to in KILLRAVEN — especially the material dealing with Yellowstone National Park — I had just written about six months previously for SABRE. So Yellowstone was no longer a viable place to have them go. The thing I determined was that it had to satisfy the people who've wanted to see a new KILLRAVEN story for five or six years.

Working with Archie has been fine, and there were no restrictions about what we could do or what we couldn't do, so there are some things in the new KILLRAVEN storyline that we certainly could never have done in the old one. There's one incident that involves two of the major characters and it's something that I've always wanted to do.

All of the major cast are back and all of them have some scenes that are primarily their own. I tried to take them forward in time a little bit and resolve some of the situations that we set up over the span of the series. However, it just wasn't possible to resolve every single thing in one storyline, and it still turned out to be a 50-some page story. It does introduce Killraven's brother, Deathraven, and what finally happens when he meets the Freemen.

KILLRAVEN has always been a difficult strip to do, just as SABRE is, because it has a fantasy *motif*. There's a large cast of characters; everything that you're introducing into the storyline is brand new and so must be explained to the readers.

There's a new character, an older woman who is an astronaut. Much of the story takes place at Cape Canaveral, at the Kennedy Space Center. I had always intended to do a story at the Kennedy Space Center; originally my first interpretation was going to be a Phantom of Kennedy Space Center, but that's not what it turned out to be in the story that you're going to see.

I wanted a character there who could talk about the space program and what it meant, and where it had gone, and what had happened to it after the Martian Conquest, and certainly none of the people in Killraven's group could have done that. So, I needed another character to be able to involve us and have intimate knowledge of the Space Center and the Space Program, and Archie suggested that I might make her a woman, and suddenly that clicked.

She's a marvelously unusual character, she's in her 50s, so she's very atypical of comic-book women, and she's not the standard macho woman who belts men in the mouth. She's got a sense of humor, more than any of the other characters, which is one of the things I enjoyed writing. It took me close to six months to write this book, so I put my dues in on it, that's for damn sure. But, she was a joy to write, and she's a good counter-point for Killraven. He tends to be so sullen and brooding, because he's got all this weight and responsibility on his shoulders. He doesn't even understand what the hell it's all about. He's little more than a kid, you know, so it was interesting to be able to play with their two characters and watch the kind of friendship that forms between these two.

I think that the last ten pages of the book are going to knock people out. It's much grittier and realistic than a lot of what Craig has been doing recently, because the story has a very realistic center, and it's pretty dramatic at the end. There's emotional fireworks, as well as physical fireworks, at the end of the book. All I can say is, I don't think anybody will be disappointed.

From model to art: Reality becomes fantasy. © 1983 MCG

RUSSELL: "I asked Don for *more* copy."

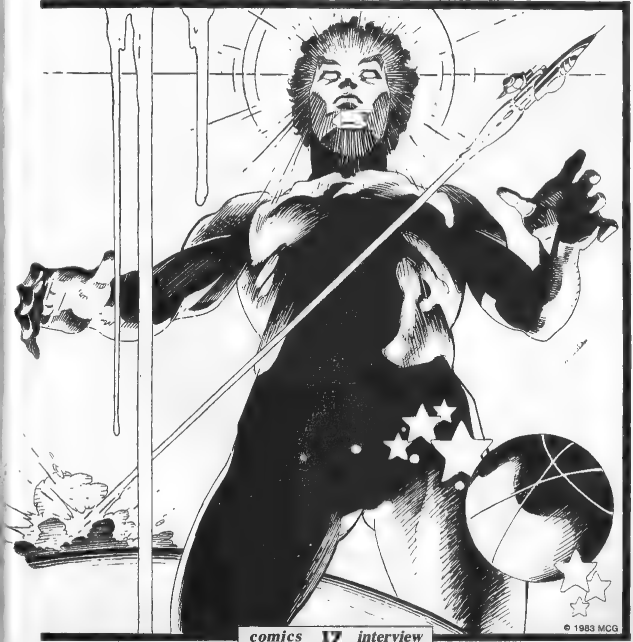
right out there for them to find. I don't like to write up scenarios of "this means this" and "this means that," although I have definite things in mind. There are several things going on, and I think it really takes the mystery or the poetry out of a piece like that to treat it like an English 101 class discovering the symbolism in a **Joseph Conrad** story. But if I get exasperated enough, I may write an "explanation."

STEVE: *Is it something that you have to get out of your system?*

CRAIG: It's a different approach. The debate about textless stories seems to be such a red herring, because people become so polarized by it. They think that if you do a story without words, you are saying that words have no business in comics, which is silly. It's just one other way of doing it, that may work. You can make a point with that, then you can do a story that's very heavy with text. I like a whole range of approaches. **Lynd Ward** did some of the most emotionally dynamic stories the form has seen, back in the Thirties with his textless works.

STEVE: *Well, McGregor's stuff is certainly very heavy with words. Does it make it tough to design the pages around Don's long captions?*

CRAIG: Not now since I've had the freedom to expand. In parts, it's going to look like one of the most sparse stories he's ever written. Other parts are very dense with copy, and there are other pages that have no words, or maybe two or three lines. So it looks unusual. But, I didn't edit anything out, I just used more space. In fact there were a few places where, because of my layout, I asked for some words to bridge the panel. Yes, folks, I asked **Don McGregor** for *more* copy! Don's very good. Someone that's always there. It's much more of a true collaboration.



"I made a lot of enemies trying to do

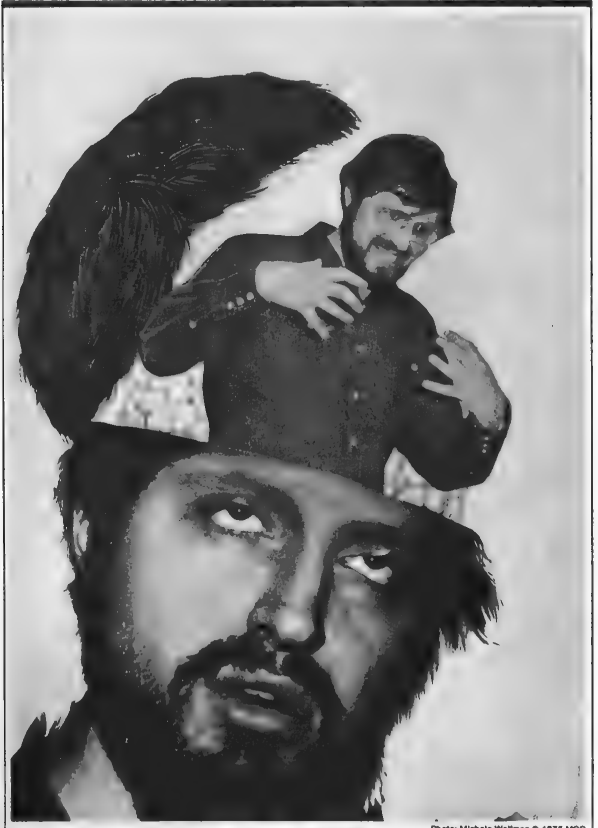


Photo: Michele Wolfman © 1975 MCG

what I thought was the right job."

MARV WOLFMAN

Even though there's a monster two-part interview with Wolfman appearing in the COMICS JOURNAL, when we heard what Marv has to say about his new plans and projects for 1983 . . . well, his enthusiasm was so infectious that we just couldn't resist bringing you this absolutely up-to-the-minute report. Conducted at DC Comics in early March, right before we went to press, the following conversation reveals Marv's very latest thoughts on everything from TEEN TITANS to the OMEGA MEN controversy to the surprising changes in store for SUPERMAN . . .

DAK: *What was it like being editor-in-chief of Marvel?*

MARV: It was impossible. If you remember the situation, there was one editor and a lot of assistant editors, and there is no way one editor can edit fifty-four comics, and keep his sanity. As much as I tried, it went bad. One of the things I found was that I don't like pressure on me. It was affecting me emotionally. I could not handle it. I'm amazed that some people can. Some people thrive on pressure — I don't. My personality changed drastically with that job. I was fighting with everyone. I don't like that. I think that I made a lot of enemies trying to do what I thought was the right job. There's no way to do the right job, when you don't have the power to do it and you're required to do more than you physically can.

DAK: *That's what people don't consider, when they think, "Wouldn't it be great to be editor-in-chief for a day?"*

MARV: At first I thought it was great. I have a chance to run a company — let's run it fairly. And then you have all these problems and it just doesn't work out.

JIM SALICRUP: *It's less editing and more administrating. All your time is spent on the phone and checking vouchers, all that stuff the readers don't see. It completely removes you from what drew you into it in the first place — the actual writing and editing.*

MARV: If there's anything I have no interest in doing, it's paperwork. I think it's the most boring thing in the world that I have to fill out vouchers to be paid. If I was wealthy and I was writing comics just to write comics, I'd never fill out vouchers, because I hate vouchers. So you can imagine what it was like when we were

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Marv Wolfman
Residence: Flushing, Queens, NY
Born: Brooklyn, NY
Occupation: Writer and Editor
Training: Essentially through fanzines. I did fanzines for many years, with the express purpose of breaking into comics. My background's all art. I went to the High School of Art and Design — and I was an art teacher, too.
Credits: TEEN TITANS, DRACULA, SPIDER-MAN, NIGHT FORCE — almost all the major characters at Marvel and DC at one time or another.
Favorite Comic Stories: "The Death of Superman," a real good three-part story, an Imaginary Tale. The Master Planner story in SPIDER-MAN. The New Men tale in THOR, featuring the High Evolutionary. And "Mother Delilah," from BOYS RANCH #3.
Favorite TEEN TITANS tales: Issue #8, because it was a turning point for me. I like the Starfire story, in which she was about to get married. The Russian Starfire story is also a favorite.
Favorite Movies: NETWORK and TEN COMMANDMENTS.
Favorite Color: Trees.

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"(Kid Flash) is leaving the book."

adding all those titles at Marvel and everything else was going crazy. I just blew up. I quit.

DAK: *It was quite a rapid rise, though. I first saw your name in an issue of CASTLE OF FRANKENSTEIN magazine—*

MARV: That was my first professional job.

DAK: *You and Len wrote and drew a story together, and there was a squib in one of the columns that said, "Marv Wolfman and Len Wein are going to get into professional comics together." It wasn't that long 'til you ended up being editor-in-chief of Marvel . . .*

MARV: It took about five years. I went to DC as a writer, working on various books while also being a teacher, worked for Skywald, became **Joe Kubert's** assistant editor, became an editor at Warren, and then **Roy Thomas** hired me at Marvel. You know the rest.

JIM: *So now you're back working with Len again — he's your editor on TITANS . . .*

MARV: Len pretty much leaves me alone on the plots and fixes up the words here or there. We have endless arguments over which words should be made bold. For about a year and a half, he told me not to put in any bold words, at all, because he'd do it. I'm starting to put the bold words back in, now.

JIM: *How do you decide which ones are bold?*

MARV: I read the line out loud and whatever words are emphasized I put in bold.

DAK: *Most writers have a different sense of which words to emphasize.*

MARV: No two are exactly alike. Len and I have completely opposite views of how it should be done.

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DAK: *I think a lot of readers have probably felt bold words were something the letterers just put in at random.*

MARV: "Heh, I feel like slowing down my pace, by picking up another pen." (Laughter.)

DAK: *How much input to the TEEN TITANS does George Perez have?*

MARV: An awful lot. In many cases, I've come up with a story and haven't even written the plot. He has the leeway to do anything he wants with it, adding scenes, taking away scenes, as long as he keeps the story essentially the same. He's a lot better at setting up fight scenes than I am. I'll give him the location, and he paces it. He always adds character bits. In issue # 8, I had the kids and Cyborg watching a ball game, and he added the whole thing with the ball hitting Cyborg, and the little kid looking up. It was such a warm scene. George primarily had the reputation of being an action artist, yet this was the most beautiful, tender, human scene, and it just worked beautifully.

JIM: *It was one of the best scenes I've read in comics for a long time, that sequence where you have all these emotions, one after another.*

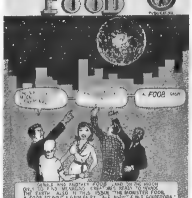
MARV: It took eight issues for me to start feeling that I could hear the characters speak inside my head. At the same point, because #8 was primarily a characterization issue, George felt that he actually got a "feel" for the faces, even though he's continued to change them. We just happen to come together on that issue and made each of the characters distinct from the others — as opposed to writing seven different characters that were pretty much identical, except that one cracked jokes.

JIM: *How about going down the list of Teen Titans and telling us your own feelings about each character?*

MARV: Cyborg was a strange one, because I knew from the first issue that the character was changing by the sixth. He was set up to be your stereotypical angry character for the first few, knowing that in the sixth issue — when he finally met his father — everything would be changing. He does have anger in him for what happened, but it doesn't affect who he is.

I wanted someone who was brought up in an educated family and rebelled for reasons of sports, not because "I'm gonna join teenage gangs." Primarily, he wanted that more personal approach to things, in contrast to his parents, who were sort of

Marv's early fanzines: SUPER ADVENTURES #2, THE FOOB and SA #9 with a Dick Giordano cover.



Covers © Marv Wolfman

"Robin's just about had it...we're

technologically oriented. He uses his technological know-how only when he really has to. He prefers the human part of him, which is what the sports brought out.

JIM: *And Changeling?*

MARV: I still have the most difficulty with Changeling. From the beginning, I knew he didn't do well with women, but pretended he did. He's the little kid of the group, the sixteen-year-old. There's obviously a part in him that fears being alone, because he's had two sets of parents die on him. He's seen his previous group of heroes vanish — THE DOOM PATROL. His original tenure with the Teen Titans ended. So he likes to hang around with others, because he really doesn't want to be alone. He fears it very much. The girl thing . . . well he has an awful lot of problems so he's flippant about it. In the mini-series, we showed that he was on the phone trying desperately to get dates. It was right to the very last — I can't remember their names . . . both names began with "Z" — but you could tell that he was having absolutely no luck. Since he was telling the story, the captions were indicating that he was having all these Hollywood dates, and everything was great, and he was having a wonderful time — but he really wasn't. He talks better than he acts. As opposed to Speedy, who pretty much acts as he really says. He is the guy who would get all the girls.

JIM: *I enjoyed his relationship with Cyborg.*

MARV: That began as an outgrowth of the DOOM PATROL stories, where Changeling seemed to be closest to Robotman. Strangely enough, I had forgotten that. Yet Cyborg and Changeling because of their personalities seem to come together. Vic's inward attitude worked well with Gar's seemingly outward attitude. I think Gar sees him very much as a big-brother type. He comes to Vic for advice and help, because he doesn't feel he can talk to his father, Mento. He would be too much in awe of Robin. Since he was always trying to put the make on the girls, he couldn't talk to them. And Kid Flash never really talks to anyone in the group; he is always the one on the outside. So the one character in the group Gar could talk to is Vic Stone.

DAK: *Speaking of Robin, what made you choose him?*

MARV: Robin was put in for sales purposes. No question about that. We felt the core of the group should be Robin, Wonder Girl and Kid Flash, from the old group. I always liked Wonder Girl. I created her origin back in TEEN TITANS #21. Len and I gave her the name Donna Troy. I liked Kid Flash, I thought he was a good character with good powers. As for Robin — the team needed a leader. At that time, Wonder Girl hadn't yet emerged as a good leader. Today, she could be.

DAK: *You really think Robin has sales impact?*

MARV: DC does, certainly. Robin is immediately identifiable by anybody — probably, around the world. He is one of the top three merchandised characters in the world.

DAK: *I guess I never really think of him that way . . .*

MARV: But he is. It's always "Batman and Robin" — Batman is merchandised everywhere, so you always see Robin, too. He is also a good leader. Up until about two months ago, we hadn't really planned to change Robin. All the fanzines

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seemed to think we were, because of the introduction of Jason Todd into BATMAN. They assumed that Jason Todd would be the new Robin, and Dick Grayson would come to be something else, although we weren't planning that. **Gerry Conway** created Jason Todd as a new character and would retain some kind of merchandising rights. And Robin would remain Robin. Also, it was the feeling at DC — not mine — that Robin was very important to the TEEN TITANS in terms of merchandising. Except that everyone seems to forget that when we actually do merchandise the TEEN TITANS, we can't include Robin in the group, anyway. Because Robin is tied, contractually, to Batman. He's tied to the movie — so we can't merchandise anything with Robin anyway.

DAK: *What's going to become of the Boy Wonder?*

MARV: **Doug Moench**, who is writing BATMAN now, **Len Wein, Dick Giordano** and I got together and talked about it. I had been leading up to this whole, long storyline anyway — where Robin's just about had it, he can't keep pretending that he's Batman's kid partner anymore. He can never *be* Batman. He's not motivated by anger the same way that Batman is. He was adopted by Batman and he was the one who always joked around. He's become very serious in the last year. He doesn't crack jokes, anymore. His feeling — that he should be as good as Batman, because now he is an adult — will never happen. He can't be. So we're going to

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going to have him give up the costume."

have him give up the costume. What the fans thought we'd do, and we were resisting, we're finally going to do — because it's best for the character. He will become his own man. He will no longer have to trade on Batman's image. The problem, of course, is that Robin has no personality at all, whatsoever. He's always been competent. That's all. He's hero mold "A." Whatever new super-hero identity we give him, it's important that his personality isn't just reflecting on his once being Batman's kid partner. He shouldn't talk about it all the time. He can worry about it, occasionally, if he wants to — but that can't be his motivating factor. So we will change him, but we haven't got a new name for him yet.

JIM: *I forgot that you developed Wonder Girl's origin . . .*

MARV: She was originally a computer simulation, in the books, of Wonder Woman as a kid. They figured it out on computers and then they would show these simulated adventures of Wonder Girl. Later on, they even did Wonder Tot stories. (Laughter.) They worked out simulations on the computer, asking what would happen if Wonder Woman, Wonder Girl, and Wonder Tot had met? This was fine, as long as **Bob Kanigher** wrote the stories, because he understood what he was doing. They were silly little fairy tales, which was fine, because they were meant for a young girl audience.

But when they created the first version of the TEEN TITANS, no editor knew what any other editor was doing at DC. They assumed that Wonder Girl was Wonder Woman's kid sister, and just put her in the TEEN TITANS — ignoring the fact that she didn't exist, and never

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giving her a name. I'm sitting at home at the time saying, "This is dumb." (Laughter.) I came in with an origin that explained who she was. Wonder Girl was an American baby that was brought to Paradise Island. Wonder Woman found her. We don't know who her parents were.

JIM: *What about Raven?*

MARV: An incredible introvert. She can't express any of her opinions. There are a lot of people like that. She can talk about certain things, but she can't talk about herself, in the slightest. She's shy, in every way. We've moved her more in that direction since the start of the series. If you look at her costume, it was obviously not the original intent, or she wouldn't have a big slit up her skirt. And she also has two fingerholes in her gloves; that was for a power we decided not to give her at the last moment, to cast spells and stuff. We didn't want her to do Doctor Strange. We've moved her to being very, very shy. She's a person who grew up being feared by the people in Azarath. They knew what she was. They were the ones who created her father, by ridding themselves of all their violence. They know that Raven embodies all their hates and fears and angers. So they did not come near her at all. She was given over to Azar, taken away from her mother. They know that the power within her is to become Trigon, the evil, again. That evil could destroy them. That's what we're building up to now. But it's not going to be like Dark Phoenix, in which Raven becomes this evil person, like every reader seems to think it is. Trigon's going to be coming right out of herself. The evil is taking her over, and once it does, he will emerge. It could be two years from now, one year from now, six months, whenever we decide that we finally want to do that story. George and I have done more storylines on Raven than we actually intended, and it's forcing us to make the move earlier than we originally wanted.

DAK: *What will happen to Raven when that takes place?*

MARV: Who knows? The story will dictate what happens. I don't think it will change her being shy, because she was raised to be a loner — not to talk, but to meditate, to suppress her anger and emotions. She's not going to instantly learn how to express herself. She won't mysteriously find the words within her to talk.

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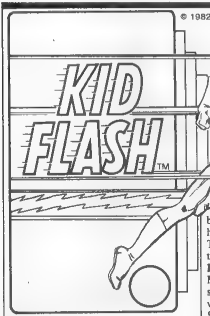
"Terra is working for the Terminator.



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JIM: *What about Kid Flash?*

MARV: As George always says, Kid Flash is Richie Cunningham. He's your typical everyday kid. He'll probably grow up to be an accountant.

JIM: *The fact that he's normal is what makes him different from the rest.*

MARV: All the others are flamboyant. He never wanted to be a hero — it was an accident. He doesn't want to be a hero. He's quit before, and he's quitting again, leaving the book. He's got to figure out what he wants in life. He's drifting.

JIM: *Its very odd among comics superheroes to see a well-adjusted character who actually loves his parents and has a strong family relationship . . .*

MARV: There are so few comic-book characters who have a family at all:

JIM: *I liked the "Dear Mom and Dad" issue. How did that come about?*

MARV: We wanted a short story told from Kid Flash's point of view, because we had ignored him. This was an issue or so after the Starfire story in which he came off sounding very negative. I wanted to make clear that he wasn't bad or anything, it was just the way he was brought up. That was also the way we had handled him in the very first TEEN TITANS story, back in '69, when he met the Russian Starfire.

DAK: *And Starfire, herself?*

MARV: Starfire is exactly what she seems — she is a very outgoing person, who wears her emotions on her sleeve. She lets you know what she thinks, good or bad. She is essentially an innocent — violence does not bother her. Her culture does not say that violence is wrong. It is my impression of what medieval Japanese culture must have been like: The ability to appreciate a lovely flower, and then turn around and cut off someone's head. They're both part of life. Now she's caught in a society that doesn't find violence acceptable.

JIM: *I think we left out the latest one, Terra.*

MARV: Terra is my demonstration that people can be led to think it's one thing when it's another. Terra is a "plant." She's been working for the Terminator. We know that by issue #34, but the Titans do not. They won't know for at least a year. She's slowly learning all of their secrets. The idea is, she's working for the Terminator and she's pretending to be a good person. The Terminator's son is also going to become a member of the Teen Titans, and they're not going to be sure if he's good or if he's bad, since he's been an undercover agent for many years. The whole point is to get two different characters who are on two different sides of the same conflict.

The fun of all this is that George has as much understanding of the characters as I do. He has never made a change that I thought was bad, or even a compromise. It's so good working with him, he's just phenomenal. I know you worked with him, Dave — and Jim was his editor at Marvel for a while.

JIM: *I introduced George to Dave, right before they did Man-Wolf together.*

DAK: *I feared for the worst. Then, when I saw his work, I wouldn't let him go!*

MARV: When George and I first met, I was editing the black-and-white books at Marvel and he was doing the Sons of the Tiger series in DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU.

DAK: *I was associate editor at the time, and whenever he'd bring in a job to you, I remember you'd say, "This stuff is terrible." It's ironic that you're now such a successful team together on TEEN TITANS.*

MARV: I kept saying, "Don't do downshots, until you know how to do 'em!" I think it made him real angry. And then he did that one splash page with the White Tiger and the buildings spelling out the name of the story. He brought it to me specially and said, "Have I learned?" And I said, "Yeahhh!"

He and I both work on the basis of challenge. Once, many years ago, a writer said to me that I would *never* learn to write characterization. It was a challenge to show him he was wrong. And I think George did the same thing. When I told him, "You can't do downshots," he thought, "I'm going to show this sucker!" And he did! It's a similiar personality trait we share — although we're very unlike

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We know by #34, but the Titans do not."

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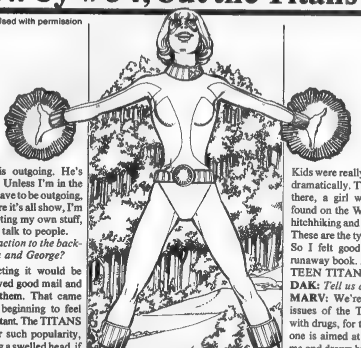

each other. George is outgoing. He's Starfire, to my Raven. Unless I'm in the role of editor, where I have to be outgoing, or at a convention where it's all show, I'm very quiet. I prefer editing my own stuff, just so I don't have to talk to people.

JIM: *What was the reaction to the back-up story featuring you and George?*

MARV: I was expecting it would be hated, but we've received good mail and requests for more of them. That came about because I was beginning to feel somewhat too self-important. The TITANS were starting to garner such popularity, and you can start getting a swelled head, if you don't watch it. So I said, "No! This is comics, let me have fun. This is why I'm in this business." And I wrote that silly back-up story, just to place my head back into position. It was a psychological repair job on me, more than anything else.

JIM: *How did the "Runaway" story come about?*

MARV: Jenette Kahn became involved with a group called the Youth Rescue Fund, which was founded by **Matthew** and **Patrick Labortseaux** from LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE. They were interested in having us do something on runaways. We did about a year's worth of research, which we primarily used to flavor the book. As it was, we were brought down to Washington, and I did some talks in front of Congressmen, and got onto the TODAY SHOW . . .

JIM: *What was that like?*

MARV: Nerve-wracking. But at least the people on my block suddenly thought I worked for a living. All they know is that I stay home all the time, and I write comic books. To them that's not work. But for some reason a lot of respect is given when you appear on TV.

DAK: *What was the purpose of it all?*

MARV: They were trying to raise money for the runaway houses, funds which the government had cut back. So I was there as a way to get some publicity for the programs, to work with runaways to show Congressmen that this was important. Kids were really hurt by these cuts — and dramatically. The same time I went down there, a girl who was a runaway was found on the West Coast. She had been hitchhiking and her arms had been cut off. These are the types of things that happen. So I felt good about having done the runaway book. And I've just finished the TEEN TITANS drug books.

DAK: *Tell us about it . . .*

MARV: We're doing a series of three issues of the TEEN TITANS dealing with drugs, for the government. The first one is aimed at the fourth grade. It's by me and drawn by George. It will be given away to about a million fourth graders. I think there will be a printing for the fans as well. The second one is for fifth grade, and the third one is for the sixth grade.

DAK: *How do you make distinctions in the writing?*

MARV: I'm not. I wrote the one for fourth graders as though I were writing the regular comic. It's a more preachy story, obviously, as opposed to the run-away story. But the writing style, the approach I took, was identical to writing a regular comic. My feeling is just write it the way I want. My daughter's favorite TV show is BARNEY MILLER. She's six! Everytime I try to write down, like I did with DIAL H FOR HERO, the books bomb, and I didn't want to do that. The only thing we did that the readers will bite their tongues over is that we had to cover

Dick Giordano, Marv, Romeo Tanghal, George Perez, Len Wein and Carl Gafford — from TITANS #20.

MEANWHILE, ON THE MYTHICAL WORLD CALLED EARTH-PRIME...
OH, LEN, I'M DOOMED! I'VE RUN OUT OF TITANS' IDEAS.
I HAVEN'T HAD A GOOD DREAM ABOUT THEM IN WEEKS!
ARTIST TO EDITOR! LEN, YOU THINK YOU CAN HELP WHAT'S-HIS-NAME?
SURE, GEORGE. GIMME A MINUTE.
FLUFFY, I'M SO SORRY ABOUT LAST NIGHT...
I HAVE TO INK TWIST OF, THOSE BACKGROUNDS!

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"Superman is my favorite character."

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up Starfire. That is because the First Lady is writing the introduction — not that she objected, but they *thought* that she would object. It was more important to us to make sure that the message got out. For contractual reasons, Robin is not appearing in the comic. However, we created a new character — not a member of the Titans — who replaces him.

DAK: *Harking back to your role as editor for a moment, what's it been like editing the OMEGA MEN? The series certainly seems to be the center of attention these days in the fan press.*

MARV: The center of controversy. I have no problem with the book at all. I like what **Roger Slifer** is doing. I like what Keith does. There was only one scene in the first couple issues that bothered me, and that is the scene where Tigorr rips the guy's arm off. I didn't realize, editing it in black and white, what it would look like in color. I'm not used to the Baxter-paper books, where the colors are really vibrant. If I had known how that would look, I would have changed that scene. None of the others.

My big complaint with all of those people who've complained about violence in the OMEGA MEN is — have you noticed there is no Comics Code Authority seal on the cover? We would not do this for the Comic Code audience. This is not for the same younger readership.

JIM: *I agree. There must be some solution, some way to clearly say this is for an older audience — like a movie rating.*

MARV: We were seriously considering it. DC has a strange problem — all these people were raised on DC comics, like I was. Most of the complaints come from older readers, who seem to cherish an image of DC Comics from the '50s and early '60s, like — you did all this great stuff back then, why do you have to do these violent comics now? Forgetting that they haven't been *buying* the DC books for the last several years. They want the books to be as harmless as they were when no one was buying them — because they have these fond memories of books they don't even like! (Laughter.) Generally, most fans don't buy SUPERMAN, but they all complain if you make changes. "Why isn't it the way **Mort Weisinger** did it?" Because you won't buy it! The days of DETECTIVE CHIMP are over with. (Laughter.)

DAK: *The people who have been complaining about violence in THE OMEGA MEN seem to have missed the point of the second issue.*

MARV: Which was a lovely, pacifistic story. I liked it very much. I think Roger is writing a very good book. Keith's graphics

sometimes tend to lead you to think that you're seeing more than you really are. The content of the stories has been good. They are solidly written. I am very pleased with it. I wish that the readers who are complaining would realize that this stuff is not aimed at kids. We're not selling it for kids. We're selling it direct sale, it's not SUPERBOY. There's nothing wrong with either SUPERBOY or THE OMEGA MEN. I didn't write DRACULA for the same audience I wrote NOVA, and yet people didn't complain because I killed people off in every issue.

JIM: *How is that reflected in the new series you're launching with Keith Pollard, called THE VIGILANTE?*

MARV: There are several sides of me. There is a side of me that almost wishes I were Raven, quiet and not able to get angry at anyone — and then there's the reverse side of me. You couldn't see DEATHWISH without leaving the theater and wanting to go (smacks fist). Right? The country has pretty much gone to hell when a nun gets carved with crosses all over her body and nothing happens. People ask for help, and get shot up. There's no way that you could not want to do something about that. THE VIGILANTE just sort of came out of that feeling — the reactionary side of me. I have not done the first story yet, although we just did the origin in THE TEEN TITANS ANNUAL.

JIM: *What did you think of the X-MEN/TEEN TITANS team-up by Chris Claremont, Walt Simonson and Terry Austin?*

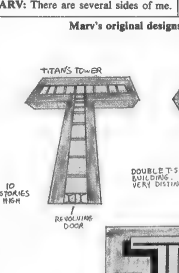
MARV: I generally liked what they did, although I would have liked to see more character stuff between the Titans and the X-Men. I think it was so large a project that it didn't allow for the two things that both books are noted for — which is their characterization. We'll see what happens with the second one. We're currently considering the idea of using Brother Blood and the Hell-Fire Club as the villains. I think that would be a nice blend. That came, by the way, as a recommendation from one of our readers.

JIM: *Tell us about scripting SUPERMAN . . .*

MARV: I'm working with **Gil Kane.**

JIM: *That must be a lot of fun.*

Marv's original designs for the Titans Tower.



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"When you can punch through a mountain

MARV: I think in Marvel's FOOM magazine I even said once that Superman is my favorite character. He has always been the character I wanted to do.

DAK: *Will there be lots of changes?*

MARV: I just got an okay to let Jimmy Olsen be married. We're planning a lot of changes. I'm very excited. Lois and Superman are splitting, completely. Lois is going to be meeting this other guy, who is about eight years younger than she. Perry's getting a divorce. Lana's father is going to die. Clark and Lana are going to get together, but it's purely Clark and Lana — no love for Clark because he's Superman. They realize that they're just really close to one another and Superman likes that. Steve Lombard was fired.

JIM: *Good.*

DAK: *He's out!*

MARV: Essentially, the idea was to blow up all the characters, and see what happens. This was Jenette's idea. She called us in and said, "I want complete changes. I want everything moving on the book. Superman's been stagnant for too long. Let's liven it up!" And **Julie Schwartz** took to that great. He's been coming up with all of these suggestions. Because Julie had been under previous administrations so long, I think he felt he couldn't make changes. Once he was asked to, he was more than willing.

JIM: *It sounds exciting. I hear there's also a relationship between Clark and Lana in SUPERMAN III . . .*

MARV: Yeah. That was strange, because we didn't know about it when we started the storyline, but it worked in beautifully. Lana in the movie has a kid. What we decided was that when Lana was in Europe for all those years, she had been married and had a kid.

After the divorce in Europe, she lost the kid. It was one of those things. And so it gives a completely different viewpoint of Lana and why she was acting so crazy after her return. Gil is doing the best artwork he has ever done. Real tight stuff. He seems excited by the series, and we are talking about doing a Superman graphic novel together. Superman is the main character I've always wanted to do.

JIM: *I've heard other writers say just the opposite. Since Superman can do anything, it could be difficult coming up with stories. I mean, so much of it has already been done.*

MARV: If I had my choice, I'd de-power Superman an awful lot. I'd sort of bring him back to the way he was portrayed in the old Paramount cartoons.

DAK: *Great!*

MARV: That's my favorite stuff.

DAK: *Me, too.*

MARV: I'd really like to eliminate half of Superman's powers — because, you know, half of infinity is *still* infinity. I don't even want the hint of the possibility that he could move a planet. I'd like to see a missile knock him back.

DAK: *Superman and the Hulk both started out rather limited, and then their strength just kept gaining.*

MARV: Well, Mort had a difficult task. He had seven Superman books. He had to keep finding interesting things to do. And sometimes the stories were really dreadful in retrospect. Only in retrospect — because I liked them, when I was a little kid. I got to hate them when I was a teenager. When I was a little kid, I thought those were the greatest stories, ever. Mort had to keep coming up with all these concepts, like what *hasn't* Superman done? He hasn't moved the sun. You can't move the sun, you'd sink right through it. But that didn't matter, back then. So I think that's how his powers grew, simply because that's how they were able to make more stories work.

Anyway, I like Superman because . . . I think it's the same reason I like Thor. These are primary characters. You can do any type of story with Superman. Other writers see it as just the problem of having to use his powers. I say, hey! There are all these powers — it's just that nobody ever really exploited them. They had him fly, punch a tank, stop a whirlwind, but they never *really* used his powers, not to the dynamic possibilities that Superman can be used.

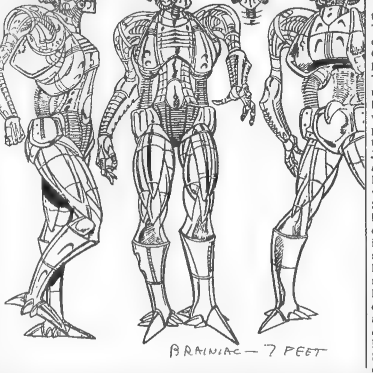
JIM: *What types of stories would you like to do?*

MARV: We're starting to do them now, with the Brainiac series. We're having Superman act more powerfully than he had been. Again, what I'd like to do, I *can* do — even while Superman is the way he is. I want to give him much more of a sense of humor — not cracking jokes, just having a light sense about him. Much more romantic, in a way.

DAK: *Have you been reading the reprints of the Superman daily newspaper strips, in THE COMIC READER? He used to be like that, he had a lighter feeling . . .*

MARV: The first couple of years of Superman stories were beautiful. He didn't have a lot of powers. He almost

Model sheets of the new Brainiac as redesigned by Ed Hannigan.



Brainiac TM & © 1983 DC Comics, Inc. Used with permission

with your head, you don't have to think."

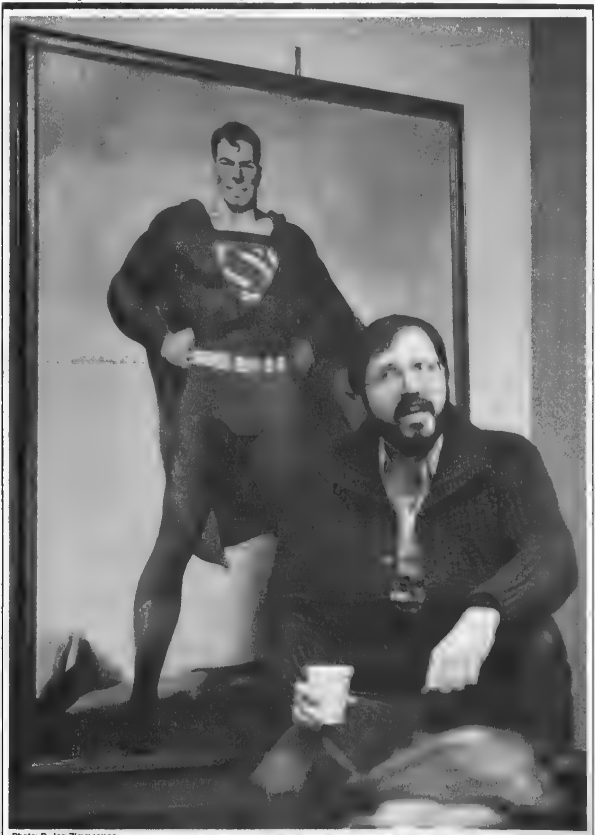


Photo: D. Jon Zimmerman

"Take the superheroes away. Give me a love book."

was a Spider-Man type, because he was wanted by the police. He would be threatening crooks — all this sort of stuff — and he had a sense of humor, too. I'd like to get back to that.

I would also like to try stories that make use of the fact that Superman has not had to develop his brain all that much. I mean, when you can punch your way through a mountain with your head, you don't really have to think. I'm having a lot of crooks bamboozle him, simply because he doesn't think first with his mind, he thinks with his fists.

Most of the villains, like Luthor and Brainiac, have always attacked him on the wrong level. When I brought back Vandal Savage in ACTION COMICS, I had him set up a corporation that went about things very legally. Superman can't deal with that. He does not know if Vandal Savage is behind it, or if it's real. And he doesn't know if it's illegal or legal. So he's being thrown for a complete loop, and he's acting totally out of character, because he doesn't know how to deal with subterfuge. He likes things head-on, like punching a giant robot. Luthor hasn't done anything to take advantage of Superman's weakness. In the past, if you wanted to weaken Superman, you threw him against Kryptonite. I'm throwing him against his own worst impulses.

JIM: *You've been involved with putting together DC's "new talent" book —*

MARV: We got eighteen zillion submissions. We got about a thousand, actually. It took me about six months to read them all. There were about fifteen decent ones. Most of those came from the same four or five people. The majority of ideas were Conan rip-offs, Batman rip-offs, Moon Knight rip-offs or things of that ilk. Very few were interesting. The few that were, I bought. **Roger Slifer** is now editing the book, and we have some real interesting stuff. **Todd Klein** — who works on staff here as a letterer — submitted a story just as everyone else did. I didn't give him any more credence just because he happened to be here, but he came up with a very nice **Heinlein** juvenile-type series. And I've always been a sucker for **Heinlein.** It's called "Class of 2064" and it's a very nice three-part story about these kids in the far future.

I've tried to make sure on the "new talent" book that there's not too many superheroes or too many barbarians or anything else. There's a blend of nice stuff. These people are not all ready yet in terms of writing, though some of the artists were. **Scott Hampton** did a beautiful job on "Class of 2064." It's his first professional job. He's since worked on SWAMP THING, and I think he's done some stuff for EPIC. He's real good. The writers were the biggest problem. Most people think they can write, because they know how to write a letter.

DAK: *Everybody — absolutely everybody — thinks he's a writer. People have no concept of the work that writing involves.*

MARV: It's incredible. What gets me are the fans who have been reading comics for years and should know better. It took me four meetings with one person just to get his plot into shape. The idea was good enough that I didn't want to let it drop. After four meetings we finally got the plot in shape, so he goes home and writes it, full script. He has nine or ten panels per page, and he has 200 or 300 words per panel. I'm not joking! 200-300 words per panel! I counted! "How long have you been reading comics?" "All my life!" "Look at a comic book! You can't fit that much copy on it. There should be some art!" (Laughter.) People assume that because they've read comics, they know how to write them.

JIM: *One last question that I wanted to ask of you. Are there any established characters left that you'd like to write?*

MARV: I like Deadman, Adam Strange, Hawkman and Wonder Woman. If I were completely in control, she could very well be to DC what the early THOR was to Marvel. She has that whole mythological background. She has a beautiful set-up for all kinds of fantasy, plus realistic stories, and it's never been done. I would love to do Wonder Woman in that style.

At Marvel I'd still love to write SPIDER-MAN. He's the one character I miss. I loved writing the book. Silver Surfer, strangely enough, I enjoyed the one time I wrote him in DRACULA. I handled almost all the others, at one point or another, except for the characters I didn't like. I never liked Hulk, so I never wrote him.

Actually, you could take all the superheroes away from me and give me a love book. I'd be interested in doing something like DALLAS. "Love" comics. I wrote lots of those, but no one knows that, because my name was never on 'em.

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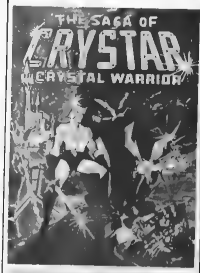
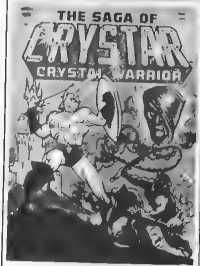
GI-6

"I'd never have a steady job again,

Below: Marie Severin's color sketch for a Crystar storybook.
Right: Bob Larkin's preliminary rough painting of the same scene.





Above: Marie Severin's color sketch for a Crystar storybook.
Right: Bob Larkin's preliminary rough painting of the same scene.

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unless I had to. But I won't. Never. Ever."

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BOB LARKIN

Feeling weary from working two days straight without sleep and still reeling from an astounding series of events affecting his personal life, painter Bob Larkin graciously consented to spend one late afternoon talking about what his life's been like lately . . .

DAK: *You've been sitting in the hospital?*

BOB LARKIN: Yeah, my brother-in-law got into a head-on collision along with his wife and two kids last Sunday. Don't mind me, because I'm tired. I've been up for forty-eight hours.

DAK: *Is everyone okay?*

BOB: Yeah, except for he was pronounced dead on arrival. They brought him back from the other side. All his ribs were broken, two collapsed lungs, heart damage, a two-by-four hole in his head, his wrist was severed, his fingers were severed—from the steering wheel. . .and while we were there, the priest was giving him last rites. I went in and the priest said, "Say goodbye."

DAK: *And they brought him back? That's a miracle!*

BOB: It is a miracle. That's one Sunday I won't forget. Anyway. . .

DAK: *Anyway. . .what's the life of a full-time painter and commercial artist like?*

BOB: Let me put it this way. I've done everything and anything. I've done romance, science fiction, adventure. In 1970 I worked for *STAG* Magazine, a male magazine. That's how I got to meet **Stan Lee.** I was doing advertising for practically everybody from refrigerators to a lot of horticultural stuff. I think I've drawn every plant known to man. I'm a Jack-of-all-trades in the business.

I usually roll out of bed around twelve o'clock, and I get to bed about five or six in the morning. I'll start sketching, I'll clean up the shop, or studio, down in the basement, and about three o'clock I'll start penciling. That'll take me to about seven o'clock. And if I have an overnight job, I'll work until eight or nine in the morning.

DAK: *So, you've been up all night now.*

BOB: All night. I got up ten o'clock yesterday. I did a DAREDEVIL cover for one of the Marvel paperbacks. I had to kind of rush things because I had two jobs to get out at the same time—a Bantam job and a Marvel job.

DAK: *So you stayed up and worked it through.*

BOB: And I still have to get home and get some sleep because I have some corrections and a full-color sketch for Marvel due on Friday at ten o'clock. This is Wednesday night, so I'll try to get at least eight hours sleep. I also have to pencil out my next Bantam job, too. So, I probably have to work the weekend to get the sci-fi job done for Bantam hopefully by Monday or Tuesday. . .*in oils.*

This year has not been a good year, but I'm still hanging in with Bantam. I'm still doing the sci-fi. I'm doing the DOC SAVAGE series, their war stories, and working for Marvel—they've canned CRAZY and I've done a lot of covers for CRAZY ever since issue forty or thirty or something like that. This year it's basically starting all over again, what I was doing in 1970 or 1969. I think I lost about nine clients this year—good paying clients, too.

DAK: *Last year was a great year for you, wasn't it?*

BOB: Fantastic. The best year I ever had. I was doing three to four paintings a week. *A week!* I stayed home and painted and painted. And this year everything went phfffft.

DAK: *Boom and bust. Being freelance isn't anything like having a real job, regular work or so-called security. Even after you've been at it for years, each time*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bob Larkin
Occupation: artist/painter
Residence: East Northport, Long Island
Born: 10 July 1949, Jackson Heights, N.Y.
Training: Farmingdale College for advertising art, but basically self-taught
Credits: DOC SAVAGE, Marvel, TV GUIDE, etc.
Favorite Color: Blue

"I like STAR WARS, DAREDEVIL . . . all

that you go out, you more-or-less have to get a new job all over again.

BOB: Feast or famine. That's the great part about it, because when you get a job, it's that mystery. That nine-to-five stuff is the same old boring grind. But when you freelance, every job is different. You're constantly worried about paying the bills. You've got to go and hustle, and that's the exciting part of it. But to sit there nine-to-five and have somebody tell you what to do—I'd never have a steady job again, unless I had to. But I won't. Never again. Ever.

DAK: *It must be tough with an income that fluctuates and a family to worry about.*

BOB: In fact the income has gone up steadily since 1970. This is the first year that I've gone the other way, and I think it's because of the government, Reagan-omics, whatever. Every year it was like $5,000 or $10,000 more and it kept going up and up and up. And the IRS would take what they wanted and I would try to bury as much as possible. This is my first bad year, and I think everyone else is experiencing it, too.

DAK: *Have you ever done comics?*

BOB: Yeah. I met **Neal Adams** in 1970 up at DC. I just popped up—I guess they were on Third Avenue at the time, or Lexington Avenue—and I just popped up there with a friend of mine. Neal gave me a couple of covers to do in pen and ink. Neal said I wasn't really cut out for comics, I was more of an illustrator. I said that eventually I'd like to do some comics. I had been drawing all the comics characters since I was knee-high to a tadpole. Comic books turned me on. That's where I learned anatomy. Neal gave me a few jobs—a BATMAN cover and a ROMANCE cover. For some reason having to do with inventory they never showed up, and then I landed the job up at Magazine Management with MALE and STAG and I was doing all the black and white stuff, then I started doing the duotone stuff. Then I ran into **Stan Lee** in 1972 and he said to do a full-color cover for, what the hell's the name of that magazine now—HAUNT OF HORROR, I think. He said to bring in a sample. That ws my first full-color job that I did for a comic magazine cover. After that I was doing PLANET OF THE APES, and I landed a few book companies. I started with Tower Books which is now defunct, Dell, Avon, Bantam. I started doing DOC SAVAGE for Bantam in 1976 after Boris had quit. I've done a lot of advertising stuff for NBC. Sci-Fi stuff. I've done everything.

DAK: *You've done some stuff for romance paperbacks too, haven't you?*

BOB: Yes. In fact, I can't remember the names of the books, but yes. Some were for Dell, some for Avon. Basically boy-girl situations on a sailboat. For Bantam I did the Angelique series. I don't know how many times I've done that: a few romances, some adventure subjects, so many damn jobs that I can't remember!

DAK: *And TV GUIDE, too.*

BOB: Yeah, a lot of black-and-white stuff for them which they kind of pulled away from me this year because of the economy. They fired everybody. I did some promotional stuff for ABC. The DALLAS series for CBS.

DAK: *One of my favorites.*

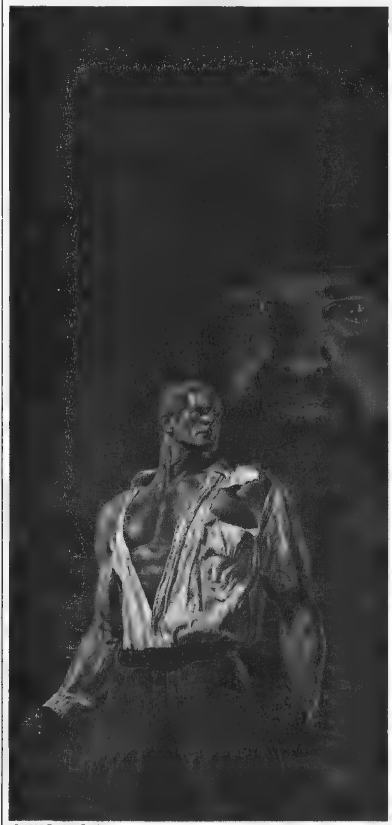
BOB: Books: THE WOMEN OF DALLAS, THE MEN OF DALLAS, DALLAS, the hard cover and the paperbacks.

DAK: *Do you usually work in acrylic?*

BOB: I usually work in designer's colors—gouache. I was basically working in water colors and then I experienced gouache when I was in college. It's an opaque water color and I can sit down and move right out on it. I can block everything in and soften later on. Oils take longer because of the drying time. I usually dry it with a hair dryer or put it in the

Thumbnail cover rough and printed final painting for MATTHEW SWAIN SF paperback.

# of them. I really do. DC and Marvel alike."



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Above: rough for DOC SAVAGE paperback cover. Left: final painting.

oven for fifteen minutes at three hundred and fifty degrees. I've worked in acrylics, but it's a little too tough because the drying time is too quick. I glaze with acrylics.

DAK: *What did you want to be when you grew up?*

BOB: My mother used to watch me draw in my highchair when I was two and a half years old. She kind of sensed that I was going to be an artist and kept pushing me. In kindergarten I thought I was going to be either an artist or a scientist and that was it. (Laughter.)

DAK: *Do you read any of the comics?*

BOB: Yes. I like STAR WARS, DAREDEVIL. In fact, I like all of them. I really do. DC and Marvel alike. I'll try to go through about ten comics before I go to bed at night just to keep up with what's going on. But it seems like the stories are not as well done. Maybe they're better, but I sense that they were better back in the 1950s and early part of the 1960s. The stories aren't so hot anymore. I don't know why. Unless I'm just getting older.

DAK: *Overdosing.*

BOB: Yeah.

DAK: *Do you ever turn down any jobs?*

BOB: Yeah, when I'm really booked solid and the money's not right. I usually try to go for the bigger bucks if at all possible. But with Marvel, I've been working with them since 1969, so it's kind of hard to leave your friends. Marvel's okay. Sometimes they pay late and sometimes the pay isn't that good, but they've been good to me, and I've never had a check bounce with them. Everybody else's has bounced. You bust your butt for your friends—no matter what the price is, if they need something—and you get a good working relationship.

HOWARD CHAYKIN'S

AMERICAN FLAGG!™

"JUSTICE...MY WAY."
REUBEN M. FLAGG

COMING FIRST™ COMICS IN JUNE!

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"I knew the job was dangerous when I took it."

Photo: Ron Fontes

HOWARD CHAYKIN

Although he is probably most widely-known to fans for drawing Marvel's original STAR WARS comics adaptation, Howard Chaykin's artwork has appeared in magazines issued under the imprint of almost every major American comics publisher, at one time or another. He has also painted many a paperback cover, during his recent hiatus from the mainstream comics scene. Now Howie's back, with a new hero named AMERICAN FLAGG, this time under the aegis of First Comics.

MITCH COHN: *Howard, what brought you back to comics?*

HOWARD CHAYKIN: I walked away from comics about two years ago, and the field has changed dramatically in that time. I created several characters for which I was never paid any more than those first initial fees. I knew the job was dangerous when I took it. I didn't have any complaints about it then. But comics have a tendency to wear you down to a nub. The fact that it's all broken down into penciler, inker, this and that. I wanted to prove to myself that I could make my living doing something else. After a series of bad experiences at Marvel Comics, I had my hand forced and so I went out and looked for something else to do for a living, and that turned out to be paperback covers. However, First Comics has been wooing me since early '82, and economic conditions say that I'd be a fool not to take their offer. So, a lot of factors combined — one being that it's a great offer; two, that it's an opportunity to re-establish myself in the business that is *the* only functioning growth industry in publishing right now; and three, I've got a real good idea what I want to do in comics and it's not something I could do in any other format right now. Period.

MITCH: *Is AMERICAN FLAGG an idea you've had for some time?*

HOWARD: Not really. The actual idea itself, the storyline of the book, started developing about a year ago, but the themes, the basic materials of the books are things that I've thought about for years. Much of the material is derived from my own experiences and the experiences of friends working in media, and just being alive since the mid-'60s. There are a lot of historical perspectives in the book, a lot of historical references

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Howard Chaykin
Residence: Manhattan
Born: Newark, NJ — against my better judgement — in 1950
Occupation: Cartoonist Prince
Training: Limited. Assistant to several bright lights in the field. I was a flunky and lacky for Gil Kane, Gray Morrow, Neal Adams and Wally Wood
Credits: STAR WARS, IRON WOLF, SWORD OF SORCERY, THE STARS MY DESTINATION, etc.
Loves: Spade Cooley and Texas Swing in general. Fifties jazz — King Pleasure and Lambert Hendricks Ross in particular. Frankly, I'm a '50s guy. I like '50s music, '50s illustrations and '50s clothing
Hates: A lot of contemporary music, and most teenagers.

"My characters work for money. That's

to both my own life, the lives of friends, and the life of the United States since the 1930s.

MITCH: *Is this a political story?*

HOWARD: To a certain extent. I'm not going to ignore the political effect of living. I'm doing what I hope will be an exciting adventure book, because that's what I do for a living, which is adventure stuff within a milieu that takes into account politics as adventure, sex as adventure. There will be some sex in the book, because sex is a major part of my life, with references to the political ramifications of drugs, of violence, of speed. I want to do a comic book that will sell to a market without pandering to that market. I don't know if that's possible. We're going to try.

MITCH: *When you say "sex" does that mean that this is going to be an "adults only" book?*

HOWARD: Not at all. There will be no nudity. To backtrack slightly — I'm thirty-two years old, and one of the reasons I left comics two years ago, beyond everything else, is that the morality of comics is that of an emotionally retarded sixteen year old or, at best, a well-adjusted fourteen year old. Indiana Jones, for example, is a forty-year-old man with the emotional responses of a fifteen year old. I'm interested in dealing with sex, along the lines of, "how would I really react to a situation like this?" I've never been associated with characters who leap around in sort of altruistic ways. I tend to do characters who have very rock-bound, solid justifications for their behavior. My characters work for money. That's what we all work for. I don't trust altruism, because I think it's the first step toward a benign dictatorship, or benevolent despotism. Frankly, that's a lot what the book is about, too. I'm paranoid.

MITCH: *Is AMERICAN FLAGG the name of the character?*

HOWARD: The name of the hero is Reuben Flagg. He is thirty-two years old. He's a former stand-up comic, pop singer, and star of a TV series who is drafted and becomes a Plexus Ranger, a peace officer in the society that exists in 2031 A.D. Reuben is a moral, some might say puritanical, man, interested in doing the right thing by the standards of those around him. Reuben is not stupid. He is a very sensitive man who will ultimately know what's best for himself and for everybody else, too. I'm trying to do a book where the good guys and the bad guys are nearly interchangeable. Because that's really the way it is.

MITCH: *Oh yeah, that rings true to me.*

HOWARD: The concept of villainy is irrelevant in my life because, frankly, I hate a lot of people that a lot of other people think are just terrific, and vice versa. I don't know if I can pull this off completely, but I'm going to give it the college try, or at least the vocational high school try.

MITCH: *It seems like the line between hero and villain fades as the years go by.*

HOWARD: I think as we get older, those of us who experience some sort of adulthood do recognize the playful silliness of costumed superheroes. We find out, really, that Dr. Wertham was right. Americans tend to think that comics heroes are all red, yellow and blue, real bright guys who have minimally schmucky problems, who fly around with capes and punch each other around. Comics don't all have to be superhero comics. I'm, interested in doing a comic book that's about something, other than about twenty-eight pages.

MITCH: *Are you going to bring a pulp feeling to this comic?*

HOWARD: I don't think so. Having penciled, or at least tightly layed out, the first issue, I don't think so. It does not have a pulp feel, by any means.

MITCH: *A lot of your characters have—*

HOWARD: Not this one. I'd be delighted to show you the layouts if you're interested in seeing them.

(Howard proceeds to prove his point.)

MITCH: *You said something about drugs in AMERICAN FLAGG while the recorder was off — who uses them?*

HOWARD: The company. What I've got is a power structure, called the Plex, which is an electronics term meaning a joining, a hub. This will be the major focus of authority. Our hero works for the Plex, he's a Plexus Ranger. The Plex is in charge of the distribution of government

Below and following pages: Art by Howard Chaykin from the first issue of AMERICAN FLAGG.

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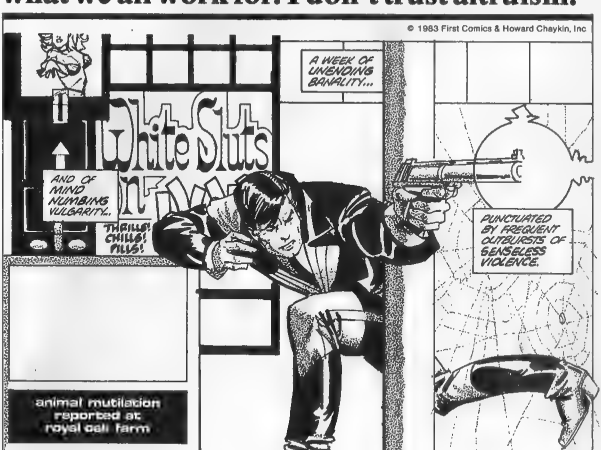
what we all work for. I don't trust altruism."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AND OF MIND NUMBING VULGARITY...
THRILLS! CHILLS! PILLS!
White Sluts
animal mutilation reported at royal oak farm
PUNCTUATED BY FREQUENT OUTBURSTS OF SENSELESS VIOLENCE.

services and commercial services. Every franchised company is a division of the Plex, including all the fast-food chains that we know today as well as the other companies that exist in context of the Plex Mall, i.e. Jerrytig custom-made Firearms, Love Canal Adult Entertainment Centers, etc. The drugs mainly are accellomine — which is a high-speed amphetamine, used by people who choose not to sleep, ever — and Somnambutol, a sleep-walking drug. Both of these are produced for commercial purposes as well as for weapons and other uses.

MITCH: *That's a great name, Somnambutal. It sounds like something that already exists.*

HOWARD: Well, that's the job, Mitch, that's the job. As I've said more than once, the premise of this strip is that the future is a lot like the present only later amd more so.

MITCH: *You said you're going to have an historical perspective in this book going back to the '30s.*

HOWARD: Well, the book takes place about fifty years from now, when the country is in the grips of a depression that makes the 1930 Depression look like a flutter in the wind. There isn't much of a country left. The United States as a nation doesn't exist in any real functional way. There are two empires that are in the process of growth: one is the Pan-African League, a very left-wing Prussian-looking black empire out of Africa, and the other is the Brazilian Union of Americas, which is most of South America run from Brazil. It is a very right-wing, very conservative empire which is the richer of the two. The Pan-Africans are hungry and smart. The Brazilians are feeling the grip of power. The most important company out of Brazil is Fourth World Industries. Several of our characters will experience adventures in Little Brazilia, a sector of Chicago. I should mention the story takes place in the city of Chicago. The mall is itself in the suburbs of Chicago. Our story takes place thirty-five years after the collapse of civilization as we know it. Civil strife, a small nuclear war in which neither of the three major world powers were involved that sort of reduced Asia and the Middle East to sheets of not very nice glass, followed by bank collapse and the reduction of population through incredibly fast-moving plague and diseases. There's probably somewhere between ten and fifteen million people running around the United States, and that's it.

MITCH: *If there are only that many Americans left, where are these empires springing from?*

HOWARD: You're asking me what the story's about, right?

MITCH: *Sure.*

HOWARD: The government is run from Mars — Hammarskjold Center, a private enterprise eco-system run by the Plex, leasing a space to the United States government. The means by which this government manages to maintain its hold on the country is through television. Twenty-four hour a day broadcasts. Everyone is equipped with a credit card, from birth. The ultimate welfare state.

The cities themselves resemble Beirut

"I could never have sold this book to DC.

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with somewhere between fifty to seventy-five political clubs; actually street gangs, armed with everything from rubber bullet weapons to Somnambutal launchers. Everything but flying machines. Flying is illegal. Our hero is a suburban cop. He's a government representative in Plex Mall 7, a Chicago Mall. It's an airport which gets two flights a week. One from Mars out of Luna, the other on Sunday from Brazil. The Pan-Africans are not very happy with our arrangement with Brazil right now and they've cut off diplomatic relations. They'll be re-established shortly.

It's a fairly complex book, and I'm very excited about it. I'm trepidatious because I'm not doing cute teenage superheroes. Then again, I'm not a cute teenage superhero. There you go. It is not humorless by any means, which is also a bit of a problem. It would be impossible to do this strip in a straightforward way.

MITCH: *It's going to be a monthly book?*

HOWARD: A monthly book, twenty-eight pages a month. Pencils, inks, and writing by **Howard Chaykin.** Colored by **Lynn Varley.** The lettering will be done by **Ken Bruzenak**, a new letterer who's doing some dynamite stuff.

MITCH: *It's an open-ended series, right?*

HOWARD: It is, although my commitment contractually is to do twelve issues. I will re-examine my commitment to them after those twelve. I don't know in what sense I will remain on the strip. With what I want to do with this book, the writing is as important to me as the art, so there's no point in working with anyone else. It's my chance to do a book that is finally enabling me to say something important about life. (Groan.) I never felt there was anything worth saying, particularly in comics, except about comics. On the other hand, this gives me an opportunity to say something about television and about advertising and about drugs. And it also gives me the opportunity to draw stuff that's a great deal of fun. One of the remarks that was made by a good friend, who looked over the first issue and got a hold of my notes, was how much it reminded them of **Alfred Bester,** a connection I didn't make, but I guess it's there. There is a certain inspiration from THE STARS MY DESTINATION and THE DEMOLISHED MAN (which is about advertising and jingle-making and sloganeering). There's a lot of sloganeering in FLAGG. The original title of the book was HARD TIMES. HARD TIMES is now the title of the first story — issues one, two, three. There'll be a bunch of senior citizens, a street gang called The Witnesses who will figure very prominently in the second story. They'll be introduced in the first sequence. What I'm trying to do structurally is an open-ended story, establishing the roots of the later sequences well in the beginning of the first so that there's lots of interwoven events. For example, I set up the basic premise of the second story, issues four through six, on page five or six of the first issue. I don't explain it. It's for you to figure out, but it's there. Also, being given the opportunity of a commitment of twelve issues, you can really open the continuity and say, Christ,

It is antithetical to what DC does."

here's a way to spread it. I'm very excited about the book. It's all I've been talking about. I'm driving my wife nuts. She's really bored. She spent all of the summer and most of autumn negotiating the deal, and for her it's all finished. "When is this damn book going to be printed, already?" You want to ask me some really offensive personal questions?

MITCH: *Yeah. Was it true that —*

HOWARD: It's possible, but I won't commit myself.

MITCH: *Was there any particular reason you chose First as opposed to any of the other comics companies?*

HOWARD: They were the ones who asked me first. I could not have done this book for DC Comics. It would be beyond the pale of reality. I could never have sold this book to DC Comics. It is antithetical to what DC Comics does.

MITCH: *It seems to be true more than ever that comics have to be about superheroes. Everybody seems to want superheroes, and yet everybody I know says they want something different.*

HOWARD: On the one hand, they say they want something different, but they keep buying superheroes. So somebody's lying. I couldn't have sold this to Marvel for a lot of reasons. There's a good possibility I could have sold it to Pacific. On the other hand, First Comics asked me in January of last year over dinner whether I was interested in developing anything. So they had first pick. And as it turns out, we liked what they were offering enough in the first place to go through four months of screaming and yelling at each other to come up with a final deal.

MITCH: *Anything else you want to say about the series?*

HOWARD: No, because I find that the idea of talking about comics, or talking about anything that's visual, is silly. All you can do is say what you want from yourself and if you live up to it, you can pat yourself on the back. And if you don't, you feel like a jerk. I want the book to sell. I hope to Christ everybody buys at least five copies because my lifestyle and that of my wife depends on it. We both need new clothes. I'm excited by the product, and if American fans demonstrate anything like taste, they'll buy the damn book.

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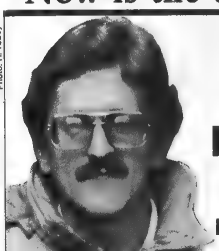

Photo: R. Tobey

TODD KLEIN

My first knowledge of Todd Klein came from reading his script for "Class of 2064." Scott Hampton was drawing it for DC's SHOWCASE book. I was also writing for SHOWCASE and, one night over dinner, Scott and I compared notes. After reading Todd's script, I was quite impressed.

I didn't actually meet Todd in the flesh until several weeks later, over at DC Comics. I walked away from that first meeting with a most favorable impression, and when Dave Kraft asked me to interview a letterer for this issue, Todd was my first choice.

The very next day, we met at the DC offices and quickly retired to the dimly lit, cheerful interior of the BrewBurger in Rockefeller Center. There, over burgers and chilli and beer, Todd told me of his career in the DC production department, locked deep in the bowels of the dreaded Tishman building at 666 Fifth Avenue . . .

STEVE RINGGENBERG: *How do you go about designing a logo?*

TODD KLEIN: I'll pencil them first, then the pencilled sketches are shown to the editors and they pick the one they like the best. Usually, I do two or three sketches for a logo. Unless there are serious problems, they pick one of those to do as a final. And I do most of it with technical pens. Of course, using different line weights and so on, which I guess is fairly unusual, although there is more of that now than when I started. I picked that up from **John Workman**, who was doing it at DC at the time.

STEVE: *What about an effect like the one you used on the CAMELOT logo, what would you call that?*

TODD: Cross-hatching.

STEVE: *How do you do that?*

TODD: The lines were put in solid, with a technical pen, and then the fading away effect was done by scratching off areas, like you would do with a scratch board. The material I work on for a logo is plastic vellum, on which it's very easy to scratch off the ink. So, anywhere that you make a mistake, you just scratch it away.

STEVE: *What about using zipatone or screens in a particular logo?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Todd Klein
Occupation: Assistant Production Manager, Letterer, Freelance Writer
Residence: Highland Park, New Jersey
Born: Plainfield, New Jersey — 28 January 1951
Credits: THE OMEGA MEN, AMETHYST, STARSTRUCK, CAMELOT 3000, etc.
Training: I was an art major in high school and had two years of college in the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan and half a year at the Kansas City Art Institute. I've been writing since 1978, but only pursuing it seriously in the last year.
Favorite Letter: S

TODD: If you use zipatone and the logo appears in different sizes, it's gonna look wrong, so I try to do everything with random patterns.

STEVE: *Say you designed the logo and CAMELOT is selling well, do you get royalties along with the writer and the artist?*

TODD: In a word, no.

STEVE: *Do you get paid extra for coming up with a new logo?*

TODD: I get a standard rate, and that can mean that the entire design was supplied to me and I just produced it, or that I came up with a totally original design. It's a standard rate, it's a good rate.

STEVE: *Have you done any lettering work outside comics?*

TODD: I've done a few logos for advertisers, but not many. Because, basically, while it pays more, the hassles are greater, too. It's not something I really look for. You run into situations where you're redoing a logo two and three times, much more often in advertising than in comics.

STEVE: *And if you're just doing it to sell dog food or something, it's hardly as artistically fulfilling . . .*

TODD: True. I really enjoy working on comics, because they interest me, whereas doing something like dog food would not interest me, so I would be less likely to get enthused about it.

STEVE: *Is working at DC a fun job?*

TODD: Most of the time, I enjoy it. But there are days when I can't wait to get out of there . . . especially when **Bob Rozakis** is away. He's the Production Manager. **Joe Orlando** is in charge of production, but Bob runs it on a day to day basis, and

"One danger is targeting to the direct fan

when he's not there, *I'm* in charge of getting the work out.

STEVE: *Well, let's talk about your writing now. You're doing the "Class of 2064"?*

TODD: Right. For the new SHOWCASE book, which is the latest version of the title. SHOWCASE is a "new talent book," that's what they're calling it. I feel a little guilty being in it, because I don't consider myself a new talent.

STEVE: *As a writer, you are.*

TODD: Even though I had a few mystery stories published over the years, I never really pursued writing until last year, when they were starting SHOWCASE. **Marv Wolfman** asked me if I would do something for the book. I enjoyed it, because first of all, I get to do my creation, which is always fun. And second of all, I'm working with an artist who I admire. I really like **Scott Hampton's** work. So I'm very pleased with what's been done so far.

STEVE: *Marv was really pushing everybody to do top-notch work.*

TODD: Most of the stories are excellent, including one by you.

STEVE: *Oh, thank you. I liked your story a lot, too.*

TODD: Now that we've patted each other on the back . . .

STEVE: *How did you sell him on the idea in the first place?*

TODD: I discussed it with Marv and showed him the things I was working from. It's a science fiction strip, which is mostly based on a NASA publication about the LaGrange colonies.

STEVE: *The L-5 Society.*

TODD: Right. Exactly. I told Marv that I wanted to do a strip about high school kids in the future, in this society, and he said: "Well, don't pin it down. Don't make it just one class of kids. We'll call it Class of 2064 and have it apply to all of the teenagers in that time, in that year, that can be part of the Class of 2064."

STEVE: *Was that your title?*

TODD: Yeah. That's the only title I could come up with. I'm not crazy about it, but it's the only one that really describes the series.

STEVE: *Do you think the market is right now for science fiction in comics?*

TODD: Yeah, I do. Science fiction as opposed to space opera, which is what we have a lot of these days.

STEVE: *Would you like to see more hard science fiction stories?*

TODD: Not so much hard stuff, in that respect — just more concentration on possible futures. I guess that's hard science fiction in a way, but I'm not so concerned with the technology as I am with extrapolation, things that could really happen in the future. Whereas in the case of STAR WARS or some of the other series, it's pretty far removed from the realities of the future, you know what I'm saying?

STEVE: *In your own strip, you tried to infuse everything with a basic reality. Those characters are living and walking around in real environments.*

TODD: Right.

STEVE: *How did you team up with Scott Hampton?*

TODD: That was **Ernie Colon's** assignment. Ernie was in charge of the artists for the book, and Scott came in with a portfolio. Ernie said, "I've got somebody who would be perfect for you," because Scott had a number of science fiction and fantasy-type things in his portfolio. And my reaction was: You mean *this guy* is going to work on *my story?* I was amazed and very, very pleased.

STEVE: *You've done three scripts, right?*

TODD: Actually, I've done four — but nobody's read the fourth one.

STEVE: *Ah, is it still at home in your typewriter?*

TODD: No, still in **Roger Slifer's** office. If Roger's seeing this, maybe he'll feel guilty and read it.

STEVE: *Working in the comics industry for five years like you have been — as a*

A page from the three-part tale Todd wrote for the DC new talent book.

AMARS, MARCH 19th, 2064. IN THE QUIET ISOLATION OF LAWRENCE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH CENTER, SOUTH POLAR REGION, THE FATE OF HUMANITY IS ABOUT TO BE CHANGED BY A SMALL MARTIAN VIRUS.
A VIRUS THAT FEEDS ON THE RADIATION-DAMAGED CELLS OF HUMANS, WHILE LEAVING HEALTHY CELLS UNTOUCHED.
A VIRUS THAT TAKES MAN 10 ENDING HIS LIFE TO REBEL.
SCRIPT & LETTERS: TODD KLEIN
ARTIST: SCOTT HAMPTON
COLORIST:
EDITORS: MARV WOLFMAN & ERNIE COLON
CTLR AMSPS

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markets. I don't think that's wise."

production man, a letterer, and now as a writer — do you think comics is entering a more creative phase, opening up to new ideas and new formats, or do you think the field is stagnating and relying on gimmicks, like the Baxter books, to drum up readership?

TODD: That's what I call a leading question, if I ever heard one. However, I do think that the experimentation that's going on is very healthy. And it's partly sparked by the desires of the fans and partly by competition. I hope it continues. I think both companies have to be willing to take chances or else they're going to be trailing in the wake of the newer companies.

Now is the time to experiment, because now the companies are doing well enough to make it work. If they wait too long, they're in trouble. One danger, that's possible in the future, is targeting too closely to the direct fan markets. I don't think that's wise. If we narrow our scope too much to a particular market, we could be heading for trouble in the future, even though right now it might work. The fans could become the dictators of what comes out. So, I don't think that's totally wise, but I do think that it's a good time to try all different things, for all different groups.

STEVE: *Who are your artistic heroes?*

TODD: The Studio folks: **Barry Smith, Mike Kaluta, Berni Wrightson,** particularly. I know **Mike Kaluta** now and I was very pleased to letter the STAR-STRUCK story that is running in HEAVY METAL.

STEVE: *Did Mike ask you to letter it for him?*

TODD: Yes. I was thrilled, because he's one of my favorite artists.

STEVE: *When you get pages of artwork, and you've got to letter the balloons, do you get them with the inks already finished or just in pencils?*

TODD: Every conceivable way you can think of that comics *could* be done *is* done, at some point, by somebody. For the GREEN LANTERN stories that I do with **Dave Gibbons,** I send him a plot, he does finished artwork and sends it in, pencils and inks, and I write dialogue and letter it on overlays. The overlays are on vellum so we make stats of the vellum, cut out all the balloons, and paste them on the art. As a production man, I hate that method of working. It makes more work for production. However, in this case, it's the only way we can do it, and have Dave do the entire art job, because he's in England.

STEVE: *But, if you're working with somebody who hands you the pencils, you have to go in and draw the balloons where the artist or the writer has placed them?*

TODD: That's pretty much true. Occasionally I have placed them myself, if they didn't have time to do it. But usually the balloons are placed by someone on a xerox, say, or sometimes even on the art, in blue, and then I have to make them fit. That's part of my job.

STEVE: *You also design the sound effects, too, right?*

TODD: Right. The places where a letterer gets to be creative are the sound effects, the titles, and the logos. Standard lettering is something that should be competent and easy to read, but otherwise not very noticeable. In general, the lettering should not be something that the reader stops to look at. It should help the story flow, help make it easy to read. I liked **Jim Novak's** comments about a bad lettering job being like seeing a movie with a bad soundtrack. That's *exactly* what it's like.

STEVE: *Is there anybody that you haven't worked with yet who you'd really like to?*

TODD: Yeah. **Barry Smith.** There are others, but I've always admired his work so much. I'd like to work with him.

STEVE: *Did you ever pay him a visit during the days of The Studio?*

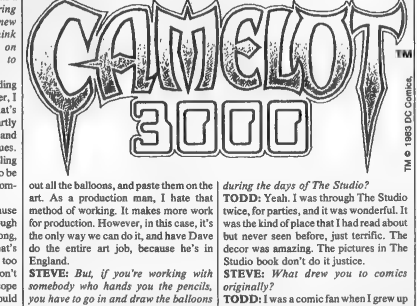
TODD: Yeah. I was through The Studio twice, for parties, and it was wonderful. It was the kind of place that I had read about but never seen before, just terrific. The decor was amazing. The pictures in The Studio book don't do it justice.

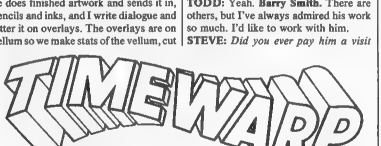
STEVE: *What drew you to comics originally?*

TODD: I was a comic fan when I grew up — a reader, I should say, more than a fan. I always enjoyed reading them, and when the time came for me to look for a job — in '77 it was — I decided that I would come into the city and look for work, and the first thing that came to mind was to try the comic book companies, because it would be fun. I tried DC first and spoke to **Vinnie Colletta.** I showed him my art portfolio, and he wasn't too thrilled. Then I spoke to **Jack Adler** about a production job and he liked what he saw, so he put me on temporarily for two weeks, filling in for someone on vacation. Then at the end of the two weeks, someone conveniently decided to leave. They offered me the job permanently, so that's how I got into DC. It was just something that I lucked into.

STEVE: *You really didn't have to bang your head against the wall, as so many aspiring pros have to?*

TODD: I probably *would* have if I had pursued it as an artist. But because I had had production training on other jobs. I was able to put that to use. Production is really one of the unsung jobs in comics. Not many people know about the production people, and since they don't get their names on the books, that's one of the things that everybody ignores, but it really takes artistic ability and a lot of good sense to be a production person. So, it's good training there, too. As I was doing the production work, I was doing lettering corrections on the jobs, and trying to develop that as much as I could. After about a year of production work, I was able to get work as a letterer, but it took about another year until I was really happy with the lettering I was doing.





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PRESENTS BLACK HOOD #1

BLACK HOOD#1
32 PAGE COLOR COMIC
PRINTED ON MANDO STOCK

DIRECT SALES ONLY!
$1.00 RETAIL

STORIES BY: ROBIN SNYDER
CARY BURKETT
MARV CHANNING

ART BY: ALEX TOTH • DOUG WILDEY
GRAY MORROW • AL MCWILLIAMS

RESERVE YOUR COLLECTOR'S EDITION#1 NOW!

RED CIRCLE COMICS GROUP

ON SALE AT YOUR LOCAL COMICS STORE IN MAY!

"We own Red Circle and Archie Comics."

DICK GOLDWATER

We found Dick Goldwater in a good mood about the comics field in general and, in particular, about Archie Comics' re-entry into the superhero field under the Red Circle imprint — as well as his own recent transition from editor-in-chief to publisher. He joked that you could tell they were doing well by the fact they were able to afford new carpeting . . .

DAK: *Why did you decide to revive Red Circle?*

DICK GOLDWATER: In the '60s and '70s — when we published as Mighty Comics and as Red Circle — we had only one method of distribution. That was the newsstand through wholesalers. And we were not particularly successful. We had a few titles coming out per month and, quite frankly, they got lost in the sea of other superhero titles. But now, because of the direct distribution system, we feel the time is right to revive all our best superhero characters from the late '30s and the early '40s as well as some of the properties that we created in the '60s.

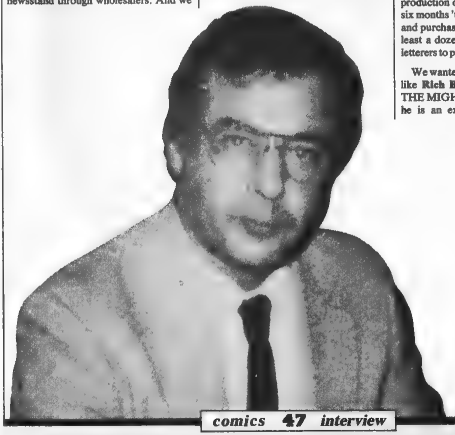
JIM SALICRUP: *Who makes the decisions?*

DICK: Until January of this year, I was managing editor and editor-in-chief of the company, and in the middle of January, I became co-publisher with my friend, **Mike Silberkleit.** Mike and I own the company. We own Red Circle and Archie Comics.

JIM: *How's Red Circle doing now — or is it too soon to tell?*

DICK: The idea was conceived a year ago for Red Circle's re-entry into the publishing business. Since then, we have hired an editorial staff. **Rich Buckler** is editor of some titles and managing editor of the whole line. **Robin Snyder,** assistant editor, will be our press liason and is working on some other projects that we have in the works like doing some Baxter books, perhaps re-issuing some of our old material that hasn't seen the light of day for twenty years. He's also going to be helping **Mike Silberkleit** with direct sales. And we reorganized our Archie Comics staff to be able to handle the production on Red Circle. It took at least six months 'til we actually could get going and purchase script and art. We hired at least a dozen writers, artists, inkers and letterers to produce material for the books.

We wanted to go with collectible artists like **Rich Buckler,** who is also writing THE MIGHTY CRUSADERS. We feel he is an excellent artist, a very good



"Anybody can create a comic-book character.

editor, and he has a lot of contact in the industry. Rich has brought a lot of interesting people in to write and draw and edit. At this time, we plan on having no fewer than four bi-monthly comics, starting with MIGHTY CRUSADERS. THE FLY is our second title. The third title will be THE SHIELD, and the fourth will be THE BLACK HOOD. All those will be brought out on a regular basis, which will give us at least twenty-four issues a year coming out. We have some other projects being planned, one being THE COMET, a **Jack Cole** character from the early PEP COMICS.

JIM: *Are any of the artists and writers who were involved with the original versions of these characters involved with the new versions?*

DICK: Two so far. **Robert Kanigher** is doing STEEL STERLING again and **Gray Morrow**, who was working on THE BLACK HOOD for us when we reissued that title in the '70s, is working for us again and doing THE BLACK HOOD. When we decided to bring the title back, Gray was very excited about doing it. Besides artists like **Jim Steranko**, who did a series of FLY covers; **Steve Ditko**, who has done the second issue of THE FLY; and **Alex Toth**, who is doing some covers for BLACK HOOD, we're contacting a lot of interesting people who originally did work for us in the '40s, '50s and '60s to see if there is any interest from them in working for us again. We are going for the artists who are the most collectible and will create the most excitement in the direct market.

DAK: *How involved are you in the creative end? After having been editor-in-chief for so long, how are you making the transition to publisher?*

DICK: Quite frankly, I can't stop being editor-in-chief. I have to put my nose into everything. Not that I necessarily want to interfere with what's being done, but I have a feel for the business on the editorial end, and I like to watch everything that's being done and make sure that the quality of our product is the best in the industry. Whether or not we achieve that is something else — but we're going to try.

JIM: *How are the new Red Circle books doing?*

DICK: MIGHTY CRUSADERS is very successful. FLY, we believe, will be more successful. MIGHTY CRUSADERS will be our flagship publication, but as a team-up book it will probably never do as well. The other properties that we have — such as THE FLY, and THE SHIELD, and THE BLACK HOOD — have a chance at selling better, although it remains to be seen what the public will like, what their favorites will be.

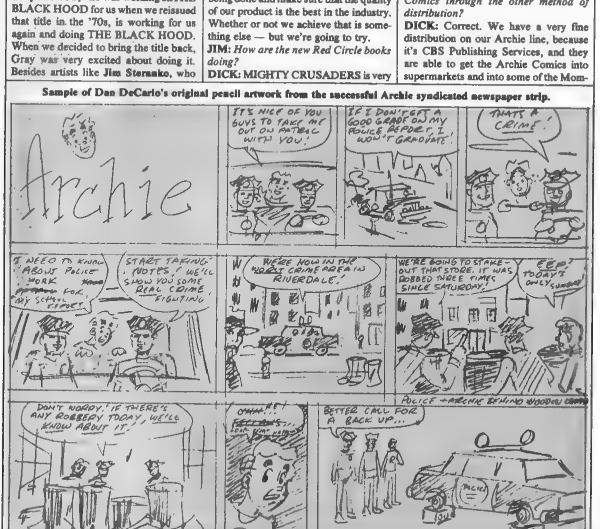
DAK: *What do you think of this new method of distribution?*

DICK: Direct sales distribution is probably a publisher's dream. Whatever orders he gets, he will print copies for those orders — perhaps putting a few thousand copies aside to use for promotional purposes. He doesn't have to waste his money printing comics that will later be destroyed.

DAK: *Are you continuing to do Archie Comics through the other method of distribution?*

DICK: Correct. We have a very fine distribution on our Archie line, because it's CBS Publishing Services, and they are able to get the Archie Comics into supermarkets and into some of the Mom-

Sample of Dan DeCarlo's original pencil artwork from the successful Archie syndicated newspaper strip.


Archie
IT'S NICE OF YOU GUYS TO TAKE ME OUT ON PATROL WITH YOU!
IF I DON'T GET A GOOD GRADE ON MY POLICE REPORT, I WON'T GRADUATE.
THAT'S A CRIME!
I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT POLICE WORK FOR MY SCHOOL REPORT.
START TAKING NOTES, & WE'LL SHOW YOU SOME REAL CRIME FIGHTING.
WE'RE NOW IN THE HIGH CRIME AREA OF RIVERDALE.
WE'RE GOING TO STAKE OUT THAT STORE. IT WAS ROBBED THREE TIMES SINCE SATURDAY!
EEP! TODAY'S SATURDAY!
DON'T WORRY. IF THERE'S ANY ROBBERY TODAY, WE'LL KNOW ABOUT IT.
POLICE + ARCHIE BEHIND WOODEN CRATE
OHMAGAD! FEETSIES, I'M SO HUNGRY!
BETTER CALL FOR A BACK UP...
POLICE

© 1983 Archie Comics

It's a matter of getting published."

and-Pop stores that are still in existence. And we are very satisfied with the distribution. We have very little competition. There are no other properties around that directly compete with Archie Comics. Therefore, we are having no problems with the distribution.

JIM: *How are the digest-size Archie Comics doing?*

DICK: The Archie digests are very successful, a perfect item for supermarkets. We've gotten into buying some rack space at the check-outs. Our sales are excellent.

JIM: *How does that work, buying rack space?*

DICK: Supermarkets charge for the display space of all magazines at the check-outs.

DAK: *Sort of a rental fee?*

DICK: You have to pay for the actual manufacture of the rack. It's not really an extra charge — if you want the space, the supermarket has to pay for the rack, therefore you have to reimburse them. We get a much higher percentage of sales than we would in the Mom-and-Pop stores, and that higher percentage will eventually pay for the display space.

DAK: *I would think that space at the check-out itself would be fairly limited.*

DICK: That's correct, but the size of our magazine is fairly small, it doesn't take up too much space. And it's one of the few children's items that is displayed at the counter.

DAK: *Point of purchase, I guesss they call it.*

DICK: Correct. The details are worked out by CBS.

JIM: *I've seen some religious Archie Comics — what's the story?*

DICK: For the past ten years, we've published some religious Archie material through Fleming H. Revell Publishing Company. Our contract with them just recently expired and so we are now publishing just on a reprint basis.

JIM: *Where are those sold?*

DICK: Primarily in religious bookstores.

DAK: *So that's yet a third method of distribution.*

DICK: Yes. We did all the production, the separations, and the printing and sold the product in bulk to the Fleming H. Revell Company, which did the distribution of the comics.

DAK: *Let's back-up just a little to ask something about the history of Archie. How long have you been involved?*

DICK: My Dad created the Archie character in 1941, although he actually started the company in 1939. At that time, they were producing superhero comic books. When Archie was created in 1941, it became much more successful than the superhero properties that we were producing and slowly but surely replaced all of them.

I came into the business in 1956. My primary function was cleaning out the stockroom, wrapping up comic books, going out and checking newsstands and getting involved in all the little dirty things that had to be done in a comic-publishing office. There was no way to start lower than I did. I finally felt that I had to get out of sweeping the stockroom floor, and became a paste-up and mechanical person in the production department. I slowly worked up through the ranks.

In 1962, I became the editor of Archie Comics. During that time we were publishing ARCHIE and decided we would like to try to get back into the superhero market. We published three or four comic books at that time — THE DOUBLE LIFE OF PRIVATE STRONG was first. We also published THE FLY and THE JAGUAR. As I mentioned the distribution was not particularly success-

Rare chance to see an unpublished cover sketch for MIGHTY CRUSADERS by Rich Buckler.

"We will treat the Red Circle comics as

ful, and we suspended publication after several years.

DAK: *You also briefly published THE SHADOW around that time, right?*

DICK: Around that period we had a paperback publishing company, called Belmont Books, which had licensed the Shadow property for paperbacks. We thought it might be interesting to put out a series of SHADOW comic books, but again they got lost on the newsstands. We don't feel we got good distribution of those comics.

DAK: *Archie owned Belmont back then?*

DICK: That's correct.

DAK: *Do you still have any ties with paperback publishing?*

DICK: No, we don't.

JIM: *You mentioned that your father started the company. What's the story behind that?*

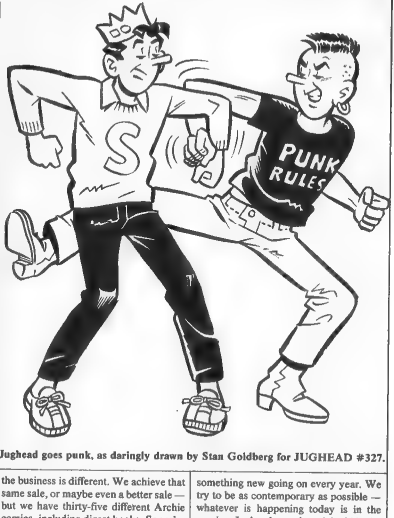
DICK: Well, he had been in the distribution business, primarily the distribution of comics, magazines and periodicals overseas. SUPERMAN had come out in 1938, and it was a complete sell-out. DC Comics also had some other comics properties that were successful, so my Dad felt that was the type of business he would like to be in — publishing is a lot less wear and tear on the body than lifting bundles of magazines. So he started what became the Archie Publishing Company and developed it into the enterprise that it is today.

JIM: *How did he create Archie Andrews?*

DICK: Well, anybody can create a comic-book character. It's a matter of getting it published — and that's very easy if you are the publisher. You take a chance with a lot of different properties and you never can know what is going to hit. You use your own ideas and you use other people's ideas. Archie first appeared in PEP Comics, later on in its own title. It got an overwhelming response, so that we decided to do more and more Archie material, and it finally just took over the whole company because of the popularity. It could have been someone else's property. It just so happened that Archie became tremendously successful.

DAK: *At its most successful point, how many Archie titles were you selling?*

DICK: Well, we are probably publishing more Archie titles right now than we ever did. Back then it was just one Archie title, with Archie stories also appearing in LAUGH and PEP comics. I believe at the peak we sold a million-and-a-half ARCHIE comics a month, just that one title. Now the business is different. We achieve that same sale, or maybe even a better sale — but we have thirty-five different Archie comics, including digest books. So we're actually reaching a greater audience, but we need numerous titles to do it.



© 1983 Archie Comics

Jughead goes punk, as daringly drawn by Stan Goldberg for JUGHEAD #327.

JIM: *What makes a successful Archie story?*

DICK: You must keep the characterization consistent, in the writing and artwork. We very seldom ever deviated from the original concept. We looked for the very best artists we could find, **Dan DeCarlo** being one, **Stan Goldberg** being another. Fine artists, although they don't seem to have the reputation that some of the adventure artists do in the direct market. They are still two of the finest artists in the business. Dan is an excellent artist who has been in the business many years — he started with Timely Comics. When he stopped doing MILLIE THE MODEL he came over to Archie and for us he was a marvelous find.

JIM: *After all these years, are you ever stuck for Archie story ideas?*

DICK: Very seldom. There's always something new going on every year. We try to be as contemporary as possible — whatever is happening today is in the comics. Jughead was the original hippie, and today he may be into punk music. The stories we do now, we feel, are more contemporary than most of the other publishers in the industry.

DAK: *I heard something about the image of the Archie line being updated — is there anything to that?*

DICK: Yes, there is. We're always revising and updating the line. Because of the recession, we cut back on the frequency of some Archie comics. We find now that sales have improved tremendously over the last six months and we will probably be increasing the frequency of the Archie comics. If we do, we are going to have to look at the idea of buying new artwork and stories — and we will be looking into *completely different* approaches.

JIM: *How old is the age group that reads Archie?*

DICK: Archie readers start at seven and probably leave us at twelve or thirteen. We find that when they start off, it's a

though they were approved by the Code."

fifty-fifty split, boys and girls. But as the boys begin to read more of the superhero comics as they grow older, we're probably left with more girls in the twelve-to-thirteen-year-old age group.

JIM: *How did the ARCHIE animated TV series affect sales?*

DICK: Sales went up a few percentage points, but not really anything to get excited about. A TV show does bring in licensing and merchandising revenues, and then those revenues can be used to publish more books. So it's a cycle. I didn't even think the SUPERMAN movie helped the publishing all that much — but it must have brought in a lot of licensing and merchandising revenues, which they were able to plough back into their company, and make a lot more money on new publishing ventures.

JIM: *Did Archie Comics get any royalties on, for example, The Archies' hit, "Sugar, Sugar"?*

DICK: Yes, we did receive royalties on the music from "Sugar, Sugar," "Bang Shang-A-Lang" and some of the other well-known music from the late sixties by The Archies, which was a studio group. **Ron Dante** was the writer and artist of the songs. **Don Kirshner** produced the music for the show and it really turned out to be an excellent package. As a matter of fact, I think "Sugar, Sugar" was the song of the decade.

JIM: *Are there any plans for Archie on TV again? Is it in syndication?*

DICK: We have plans for the possibility of an Archie movie — we have an option out for a full-length live-action feature film. We have the cartoons ready to go back into syndication, and there is always the possibility of new cartoons, but they are very, very expensive to produce. We have the possibility of a Broadway show. We have the possibility of a live Archies group, if we do have a movie. There are a lor of things that could happen in the next year or two. That all comes under the category of licensing and merchandising.

DAK: *Do you handle that yourself?*

DICK: No, we don't. In fact, at this point, **Marvel** Comics is our licensing agent.

DAK: *That's interesting. Also, isn't your father in charge of the Comics Code Authority?*

DICK: He was president of the Comics Magazine Association, but **Jim Galton** is currently the president. My Dad has moved up to Chairman of the Board. He was president for over twenty years.

DAK: *For the direct sales market, are you publishing under the Code, or are you publishing without the code seal?*

DICK: At this particular point, this is a sore point. We will treat the Red Circle comics as though they were approved by the Comics Code Authority whether or not we use the seal. As a matter of fact we will be submitting all our material to the Code Authority as though for their approval. We feel that we have an obligation to the public not to put anything in the comics that would be objectionable. You will not see nudity in Red Circle comics nor will we have excessive violence. What we do intend to do — to make them different from the Archie Comics — is to make the stories as interesting as possible. The dialogue will be written for a slightly older reader. This is how I think we can solve the problem of whether or not it should go through the Code.

JIM: *So far, all the Red Circle titles are Archie-owned characters. Are there any plans for creator-owned properties?*

DICK: Yes, there are. We have mentioned to a couple of the top writers and artists in the field that we would co-publish their properties for a percentage of the profits — split between the owner and either Red Circle or Archie depending on which company is doing the publishing.

JIM: *Sounds like a fantastic deal . . . had any takers yet?*

DICK: Yes. we are co-publishing THUNDER BUNNY with **Marty Greim.** That was originally published by Charlton, and we feel that it has a viable place in the direct comic-book market. We will be doing the publishing, he will be doing all of the art and editorial, and we will share the profits.

JIM: *Is John Carbonara involved?*

DICK: John Carbonaro is not involved with us on **Red** Circle, but we will be helping him publish THUNDER AGENTS

Martin Greim's character, Thunder Bunny, as depicted by Buniak & Giacola for Red Circle.

© 1983 M.L. Greim

"Mike Silberkleit and I own the company."

and HALL OF FAME and there is new material being drawn for brand-new comics. He is actually the publisher, and we are giving him financial help. THUNDER AGENTS is his property. We don't really want to take it over. That particular area of publishing is his, but he does not have the financial means to bring out the books, so we're helping.

DAK: *Do you keep up with what the other publishers are doing?*

DICK: I've been looking at Marvel, DC, First Comics and Pacific Comics. I find that the material they are putting out is very nice.

JIM: *What impresses you in particular?*

DICK: I like the direct market Baxter books that they're doing. Marvel started the Baxter-type book — I saw the first one before it went into national distribution, and I thought it was one of the finest comics that I'd seen in a long time. And now that everybody is getting into Baxters, I think it's making the art look just remarkable.

We have some of the very best artists in the country doing comic books today. A lot of the fellows who went out of comic books into the ad agencies in the '50s and '60s, have now come back, because it's a great field to get into. They get their artwork back, which they never did. They get credit. They're making much better financial deals, not only on page rates, but they're also getting a percentage of the profits from the comic publishing companies, and I think that it's stimulating the entire industry. Plus, the fan reaction is phenomenal when they go to conventions.

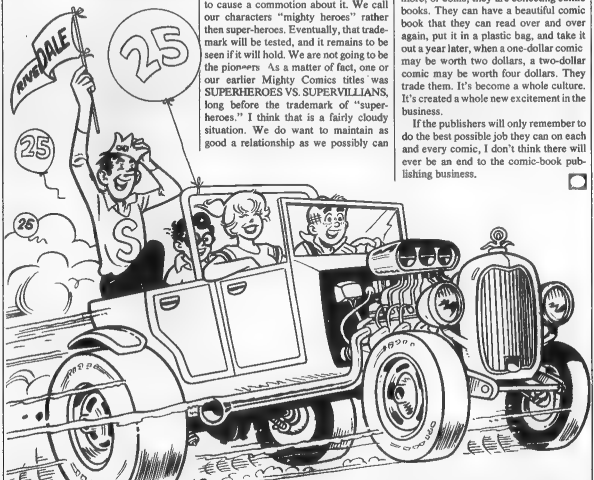
DAK: *Now that you're back in the business of publishing super-hero comics, does the fact that Marvel and DC have co-trademarked the word "superheroes" — mean that you can't call your characters, "superheroes"?*

DICK: That's a question that we haven't really addressed yet. Originally, it was more of a generic term, rather than anything that should have been copyrighted — but we didn't feel that it was necessary to cause a commotion about it. We call our characters "mighty heroes" rather then super-heroes. Eventually, that trademark will be tested, and it remains to be seen if it will hold. We are not going to be the pioneers. As a matter of fact, one of our earlier Mighty Comics titles was SUPERHEROES VS. SUPERVILLIANS, long before the trademark of "superheroes." I think that is a fairly cloudy situation. We do want to maintain as good a relationship as we possibly can with the other publishers, so I don't think there's any point at this particular time arguing about whether it will hold up in court.

DAK: *Since your father started the company, you've certainly seen comics go through a lot of changes. What do you think about the comics field today?*

DICK: It's more exciting than ever, I think primarily because of everybody's effort in the business — from the writer all the way on to the distribution — to promote comics to the public, to say "This is what we can do to entertain you, that no other medium can." There are many, many more places to sell comic magazines. The direct-market distributors have done a tremendous job in locating bookstores that will sell comics. We find the comic conventions have helped tremendously — bringing in all of the fans to meet people who work in the publishing companies. There's very little to collect — people are not collecting stamps anymore, or coins, they are collecting comic books. They can have a beautiful comic book that they can read over and over again, put it in a plastic bag, and take it out a year later, when a one-dollar comic may be worth two dollars, a two-dollar comic may be worth four dollars. They trade them. It's become a whole culture. It's created a whole new excitement in the business.

If the publishers will only remember to do the best possible job they can on each and every comic, I don't think there will ever be an end to the comic-book publishing business.



Dan DeCarlo's cover art for the 25th Anniversary issue of ARCHIE.

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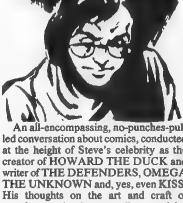

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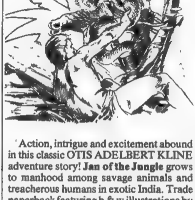

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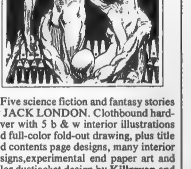

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"We had 52 episodes (of) a Japanese live-

GENE PELC

Wearing his trademarks — dark sunglasses with a gray business suit — and looking a lot like the third Blues Brother, Gene Pelc took time out from a last-minute blitz of business meetings in Manhattan to discuss Marvel's Japanese merchandising before flying back to the Land of the Rising Sun . . .

I was in radio for a lot of years, and there were always young guys jumping from one station to another, looking to get into show business and the big time. I decided to get out of that silly, immature business into a real man's business — so I got into comics.

You have to realize that was sarcastic.

I represent Marvel East and Marvel West in both the TV and animation facilities, licensing comics and doing anything that we can in Japan.

In the animation division, we are doing all the new SPIDER-MAN episodes for NBC. We did twenty-six for syndication. I oversee and coordinate what we do at the studio, which is taking the shows from layouts to camera there. I am also acquiring properties in Japan to be used in America and trying to put together some co-productions.

One product that I just acquired is a war film called 198X FUTURE WAR. We'll have to change the title, but it's a one-hundred-thirty minute animation concerning what everybody today is afraid of: The accidental nuclear war. It's a very realistically done animation film. We're hoping to get people like **Simon and Garfunkel, Paul McCartney** — people with broad spectrum appeal but with anti-nuclear credentials — to create a music-track for this film. If you've seen that film, like I have, in the screening room, you know it'd be the greatest thing in the world to end the thing with "Give Peace a Chance." L.A. is now working to create a new voice and music track, and then make a deal with a major distributor.

Here, on this side of the world, I try to license Marvel's properties, merchandising of comics, anything between the U.S. and Japan, and also Korea. We just opened up Korea. It has a huge, growing market. Over in Japan, I've been responsible for 208 live-action half-hour TV shows — we've been on the air with the Marvel copyright, the Marvel concept and the Marvel characters, four years in a row . . . starting with SPIDER-MAN, which began roughly four-and-a-half years ago. We had him on for fifty-two episodes. This was a Japanese live-action version of Spider-Man, all new, all re-shot, all scripted over there.

You won't be seeing them here, though, because of Marvel's commitment to Columbia. They had a live-action show. So the territory is limited to Japan. We're controlling the territories because the Japanese market is so big but so different. Mostly what we do is cut off the Japanese market as a territory and then we make film in Japan, for Japan, but we don't let it out because it would conflict with other shows that are going on.

We did something called BATTLE FEVER J, which is a concept based on THE AVENGERS, in that you had superheroes from different countries: Captains France, Kenya, Russia and Japan — and Miss America. Originally, we wanted Miss America leading the team, but we couldn't do that in Japan, so Captain Japan became the leader.

I found that it was much easier, once we had done a lot of Japanese programs, to come up with new concepts based more closely on what the Japanese are viewing, rather than just taking Marvel characters and re-doing them. At that point, we started getting into creative new stuff, and we did fifty-three episodes of DENJI MAN — about a year of that.

The latest one, called SUN VULCAN,

Pages from DR. SLUMP, a widely-merchandised non-Marvel Japanese comic (mentioned last issue by Will Meugniot).

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Gene Pelc.
Occupation: Marvel representative for the Orient.
Residence: Toyko, Japan.
Born: Queens, N.Y.
Outstanding Achievement: I can eat raw fish without throwing up.

action version of Spider-Man, all new."

is technically our best product. We did fifty-two episodes. I just talked to **Stan Lee** about a half hour ago and he is so in love with the program. He said that in all his experience of writing for people, if they could see this show in America on Saturday morning, it would wipe out anything because it's full of action and very entertaining. He's trying to sell this to an American network, HBO, anyone who buys films. He can sell it as is with a new voice track, or take the prints and cut out the parts where Japanese actors appear, which is about one-third of the film, re-shoot that with American actors, and cut back to the show with the special effects and opticals and visuals, thus creating a series that looks American.

Those are the things I'm proudest of. We also did a DRACULA two-hour animated movie film, which was based on the original **Tom Palmer - Gene Colan** concept. We changed it a lot and adapted it for the Japanese market.

I've mentioned the live-action and animated stuff, but I should mention the things I've done in comic books, too.

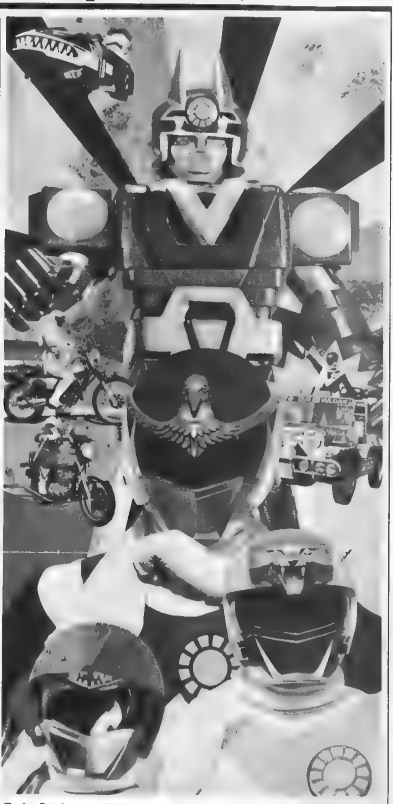
What I'm most personally proud of is the concept of the POPE comic. I was in Tokyo when I heard that **Pope John Paul II** was going to take a trip to Japan. I happened to know a Polish priest and he came up with a way for me to meet the Pope. I had a chance to very briefly say hello.

That's when the idea occurred to me — how about a POPE comic! The ST. FRANCIS book was a tremendous, successful comic for Marvel.

The Polish priest put me in touch with **Father Malinski,** who is a life-long friend of the Pope. He grew up with him, visits with him all the time at the Vatican, and is the official biographer of the Pope. He's written nine or ten books about his life.

So, I met with **Father Malinski** and showed him the ST. FRANCIS book and we discussed the possibility of doing the POPE comic. He apparently conferred with the Pope and his people, came back to my house the next day, and said that the Pope was willing to do it — if he wrote the script. I brought **Father Malinski** into New York. The Father brought all his books, all the European books, plus pictures of the Pope when he was a child, of his family and home. I honestly believe the POPE comic will be the largest selling comic of all time. We're going to do ST. THERESA next.

As for how I'd describe my occupation — I actually do very little, I just confuse everybody so much they can't do without me.



Eagle, Panther and Shark — with merchandisable accessories — from the Marvel/Toei SUN VULCAN TV show.

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Super Dupont and friends depicted by Neal Adams for FLUIDE GLACIAL #80.

D.JON ZIMMERMAN

There are more comics on sale in France now than there ever were in the U.S, even back in the Golden Age. Talk about a little kid in a candystore — there I was, surrounded with more comics than you can shake a stick at. They have more titles in any particular genre and they have more variety. Westerns are a big item over there. Science fiction is big. Humor. All age groups. They have a wide variety of outlets that handle comic books, from those that are pretty much like our newsstands over here, (they call them journaux) all the way to specialty comic-book shops. Talk about your store that has it all — some of those comic shops do! The largest comic-book shop in Paris that I visited — Boulinier on the Boulevard St. Michel — has two levels. It's huge. I would say one fourth of one floor just had different American editions.

Also, the distribution system is very good. It penetrates the market extremely well. When I was on vacation going through the provinces — for instance at hotels, going to bars, this sort of thing — depending on the size of the place, there were actually little or big racks of magazines and comic-books everywhere.

The French people read a lot of comic books. They only have about twenty-five million people in the country, and comic books are very popular. Now, when I say comic books, I don't mean the 60-cent items we're used to. I'm talking about items that cost an average equivalent of three dollars. They call them albums. They are hard-covered editions, like some

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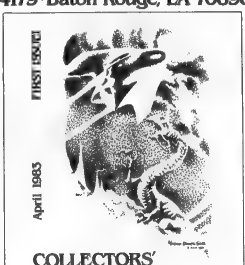

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COLLECTORS' MARKETPLACE is a new venture fresh-sprung off of some established talent—people who have been active in fandom since its earliest years: HARLEY ANTON, comic dealer and president of one of the country's strongest and best-respected conventions, the Atlanta Fantasy Fair (now in its ninth year); KENNETH SMITH, SF illustrator (still active in HEAVY METAL, the new Bradbury DINOSAUR TALES, and other fantasy works) and widely admired producer of Phantasmagoria Magazine and Portfolios; and ANGELA SMITH, his wife, experienced in design, printing, and mail-out from her years with a commercial art agency. All three are widely known throughout fandom, and are herewith pooling their experience and talent to provide an interesting, colorful, and economical forum for your advertising matter. In our venture, Harley functions as Publisher and Managing Editor, Kenneth as Art and Design Director, and Angela as Production Head. (In fact, each of us will be doing whatever needs to be done and whenever it needs doing, in order to get our magazine out on time. Reliability is everything.)

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D. JON ZIMMERMAN

"In Paris, TEEN TITANS is popular."

of the ASTERIX imports we get over here, and they seem to be the single most popular format with the French audience.

I purchased more of the stuff that I was familiar with — in other words, the French editions of the American comic books — although the French have a lot of their own native comic books, too. As far as American comics, when you go into stores for instance, sometimes you will see the American product off to one side. American comics are just a small part of the whole French market. There's no particular type that seems to predominate. The French are interested in the full range, from pornography/erotic comics to adventure, superhero, westerns, science fiction, Mickey Mouse — about anything or everything that you can imagine. They have a different standard as far as purchasing erotic material. For instance, you will see nudity on French TV — this is prime-time material! Although the country is 95% Catholic, their attitudes are very . . . we would term them liberal. They would just regard **Jerry Falwell** as an aberration. In fact, they can't understand why we get into such a dither over seeing naked women. They don't understand our hang-ups about morality and God and purity and all of that stuff in America.

Zipperman and Super Dupont to the rescue!

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Super Dupont and Zipperman sample wine.

They have comics fandom. Unfortunately, I was not able to link up with any of the people, which was more my fault than anything else, since I was not over there to find out everything I could about comics. I approached the whole comics scene as: "Here I am, a person interested in comic books — I would like to know what is available."

You can buy the American product in some beautiful editions. I was blown away by the three-volume hardcover set of WEIRD WORLD. It's printed on better paper, the colors are brilliant. For the most part, they take a lot of care to produce the comic books. They also produce a wide variety of formats. You can pick-up some very inexpensive digest-size comic books, too. In general the French product looks a whole helluva lot better. And there's so much of it.

You could pick up CONAN in a large variety of formats. Based on the fact that I simply could not find it at all in Paris, where I was able to find just about everything else, TEEN TITANS is extremely popular. It was not until I was in Normandy that I was able to find a French copy.

My girlfriend teaches English classes to French people, ranging from pre-school up to adult, so she asked me to deliver some lectures on comic books. Kids love comic books, and French kids, I found out, are no different from American kids. Joelle had to translate for me, 'cause the kids did not understand everything I was saying, but the questions they asked were surprising. They were knowledgeable about the American product. The French are very good about crediting. They recognize the creators make these series, they respect the writer and the artist. I was getting questions about TEEN TITANS, they were familiar with the things George and Marv have been doing, and they were asking me questions about **Stan Lee.** They asked about a bunch of different subjects from **Roy Thomas** to the next Conan and Superman movies. It was neat, and amazing that kids were so knowledgeable about books on the American side.

There is definitely a French attitude. Roughly half the people in France don't care for Americans and the other half like Americans. And then, of course, it's based on individual people. If you're an asshole, you're an asshole — it doesn't make any difference what nationality you are. It's also according to what class of people you're talking to. Older students tend to get more snobbish — anything American, they immediately look down upon as crass and commercial. Other French people like the vitality and life that is such a part of the American comic books. They love cultural things — whether it's fine arts or popular culture.

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NOT SELF-INDULGENT

Dear Mr. Kraft,

I just looked over the first issue of COMICS INTERVIEW and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The interviews were informative, but not overly long and self-indulgent as some of the other fan magazines are. I especially liked learning about **Novak** and **Galton** since little is heard about their jobs. I hope future issues are as enjoyable.

Todd R. Reis
4330 W. Shangrila Road
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REALLY DIFFERENT

Dear DAK:

When I first heard that you were going to be doing a magazine containing nothing but interviews, I thought it was a great idea. After all, in the average fanzine, the interview is always the first thing I turn to, and is generally one of the most interesting features. (Plus, I was familiar with your work on FOOM.)

But when I saw that instead of just fan favorites, you were also going to be interviewing letterers and colorists, I figured that COMICS INTERVIEW would not be too interesting. Surprisingly, however, you succeeded in proving me wrong. In fact, the interviews with **Jim Novak** and **Steve Oliff** were at least as interesting as the other features in the issue — an entertaining package all around.

COMICS INTERVIEW is really different from every other fanzine on the market today, and I intend to be a regular reader. However, the first issue was not a total success. I found your choice for

Mike Teitelbaum

Steve Gerber

"Fan in the Street" to be a very poor selection. If you're going to interview a comic fan, the least you could do is find someone who actually *reads* comics! (I, for one, would be very willing to be interviewed.)

Also, though I appreciate your trying not to confine yourself just to Marvel and DC, I think your talk with **Mike Teitelbaum** was a bit pointless. Why interview the editor of a comic company which is in limbo at the time? I'd rather have seen an editor from one of the other alternative comics companies — Pacific, Eclipse, First, etc.

Barry Dutter
2283 Old Farm Road
Scotch Plains, NJ 07076

So, Barry, we meet again! Your name was familiar. After reading your letter, I searched my memory. Sure enough, it all came back to me — the many letters you sent to Marvel as "Chairman of the Committee to Cancel the SHE-HULK," back when I was scripting ol' lettuce lips. Y'know, you may find this hard to believe, but I really liked her. Anyway, don't worry, Barry — I don't hold a grudge. Keep your carefully-considered comments and suggestions to improve COMICS INTERVIEW coming!

— DAK

GERBER ACUTE & OBTUSE

Dear David,

The idea of a magazine dedicated to interviews is an excellent one, and as a pro yourself, you're obviously in the ideal position to put it together. I especially appreciate the interviews with letterers, colorists, and other forgotten men. Similarly, I hope you will spread your net far and wide in the choice of companies whose creators you approach; I found the interview with **Mike Teitelbaum** fascinating. Whitman comics are, as far as I know, unobtainable in this country, and I was under the impression the line was all reprint. I hope you'll continue to focus attention on the less heavily-covered companies, and the growing horde of independents.

As to the content of the interviews, except for the OMEGA MEN feature, I felt the interviews lacked a real sense of purpose. The chatty, relaxed feel was nice, but I'd prefer some structure, a sense that the interviewer wants to find something out, that he has an indication of where he wants the discussion to go . . . in short I'd prefer a dialogue to a gently-modulated monologue. The best comics interviews I've read have been ones where *all* the participants have entered wholeheartedly into the fray. Perhaps you could arrange a discussion between three or four pencilers, inkers or editors, in which their different approaches and beliefs might emerge.

The **Steve Gerber** interview was interesting, though I feel he's had more than his fair share of exposure over the years. He was alternately acute and obtuse, his suggestion that comics currently look like re-cycled products of the Sixties was particularly bizarre . . . having read comics from the early Sixties onwards I fail to see

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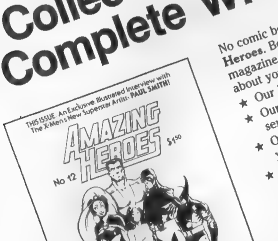

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any connection between the modern product and that of the Sixties beyond the names of the characters. Ironically, it's long been my theory that comics went through their "Progressive rock" period, believing the reviews and taking themselves over-seriously: precisely what **Steve Gerber, Don McGregor** and **Steve Englehart** were at the height of their popularity. It's only in the last 18 months or so that they've begun to pull out of that rut and recover the sense of wonder, childlike wonder, that makes the medium unique.

Anyway, best of luck with COMICS INTERVIEW.

Dave Dursley
17A Portland Street
Clifton,
Bristol BS8 4JA,
Avon, England

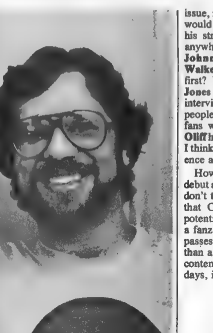
WELL DONE

Dear Mr. Kraft,

I picked up COMICS INTERVIEW #1 the other day at the ol' comics hangout without any great expectations. I mean, I felt, as you feared in your "Last Word" column, that this was just another fanzine which the STARLOG fans would eat up. Truth to tell, I was expecting mediocrity. However, my mind was quickly changed. In fact, I was so pleased with the results that I was compelled to commend your efforts with a letter.

To begin with, the logo: perfect. Give **Jim Novak** a well-deserved free issue. Next, the justification for the existence of a fanzine full of comics interviews was right on. Any doubts I harbored were quickly dispelled in your editorial. In retrospect, I realize that the idea made awfully good sense because, for me, the most enjoyable and, subsequently, rewarding aspects of THE COMICS JOURNAL and COMICS FEATURE are the interviews and letters. (Can anyone forget the **Roy Thomas/Jim Shooter** affair or the time when **Harlan Ellison** took on the universe, including **Liza Minnelli**?) Enough of the justification and back to the first issue itself.

I like the departments, they're all-encompassing and easy to remember. (My first impression, however, when I leafed through the mag was that it was cluttered and structurally shapeless. The departments, fortunately, clarify the situation.) I was delighted to find that letterers and colorists will finally have their say. Their individual contribution to a comic's look is vital and, as such, it should always be acknowledged. Well done. The different number of pages granted for each interview seemed proportionate and right. In fact, the whole issue had the aura of being "right". Everything seemed comfortable. The quality of the photographs was good, in comparison to those in the JOURNAL which are printed much too dark. The Vital Statistics were mothered by necessity. The questions asked were literate. The cover was funny. **Gerber** was great. The ads were remarkable!



Jim Novak

After all this, can there be any negative comments?

No, not really. Just minor stuff in the nit-picking mode. COMICS INTERVIEW is a professional piece of sincerity and, as such, it is a labor-of-love. The only thing I can do is throw in my two-cents on how the mag can be improved. First of all, how about once every two or three issues (or every issue, for that matter) you present a gigantic and, subsequently, exhaustive interview (PLAYBOY-type)? The subject, of course, will be someone *BIG* in the comics world. For example, **Elsner** or **Steranko** or **Jack Davis** or any of the two dozen others. And for Pete's sake, doesn't anyone have Stan the Man's number lying about? Moreover, how about a feature in which every issue, two (or more) comics people get together and have a conversation which is not hampered by the formalities of the question/answer aspect of all interviews. It would resemble panel discussions without audience participation. ESQUIRE magazine has received superb results from this type of one-on-one conversation, as evidenced by the encounters between **Coppola/Talese** and **Schrader/Dunne**, in its Quarterly Film sections. Finally, please, *PLEASE* make a habit of interviewing comic-strip artists and cartoonists (political and those in animation). The attention paid to these guys in the JOURNAL is depressingly minimal, and in INTERVIEW's first issue, non-existent. I think a lot of people would like to hear what **Schultz** thinks of his strip these days. And has anyone, anywhere, really gotten under the skin of **Johnny Hart, MacNelly, Lazarus, Walker** or **Trudeau**? Why not be the first? When was the last time **Chuck Jones** or **Bob Clampett** gave in-depth interviews? All these people are comic people and its hogwash to believe that the fans who are interested in what **Steve Ditko** has to say would ignore Dik Browne. I think you're underestimating your audience and, in turn, limiting its base.

However, I still feel it was an auspicious debut and its future looks promising. But I don't think I'll ever get over this feeling that COMICS INTERVIEW has the potential to become something more than a fanzine — a magazine which encompasses *all* of the comics world, rather than a part of it. As it is, I'm happy and content with my cake but, one of these days, it would be nice to eat it, too.

Steve Catomeris
260 Scarlett Rd. #1910
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M6H 4X4

That day may just have dawned, Steve — since we've anticipated many of your suggestions and are already implementing the ideas, as space permits. Next issue, for instance, features the first half of an exhaustive interview with one of the most respected and influential forces in the field today — DC's Dick Giordano — conducted somewhat in the fashion of the ESQUIRE style you cited by fellow-inker Klaus Janson and fellow-editor Jim Salicrup. We'll be doing lengthier interviews like this from time to time, even if it means spreading them over more than one issue in order to avoid squeezing out any of the other interviewees.

You'll also be pleased to know that we have in the works fascinating interviews with a surprisingly wide spectrum of political and comic-strip cartoonists, as well as animators and others. And you summed up the goal of COMICS INTERVIEW quite well, Steve, as "a magazine which encompasses all of the comics world." Stick around and see! After all, better for you to eat cake than us to eat crow . . .

— DAK

VERY GOOD!!

David —

Hi! I wondered what had happened to you — I only see your name in print occasionally.

I just read your INTERVIEW mag cover to cover. *Very good!!* I like the idea of interviewing the people behind the scenes, like **Galton,** and letterers like **Jim Novak,** etc.

I hope future issues will feature a lot of people from Pacific, First, Eclipse, etc.

Thanks for the freebie. Best wishes!

Bob McLeod
Tampa, FL 33624

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A LITTLE MORE DEPTH

To Whomever it is What Reads These Things,

I enjoyed the first issue — particularly the interview with **Terry Austin.** One suggestion, though — if you're going to do an all-interview magazine, you might as well have *better* interviews than anyone else. While I enjoyed reading the interviews in this issue, I did find them a little light. Not that I want you to be arrogant muckrackers, as in some interviews I've seen, but you could benefit from a little more depth. The best interviews I ever saw in a comics-related magazine were those conducted by **Richard Howell** and **Carol Kalish** for COMICS FEATURE when they were editing it. They managed to get the interviewees to talk in depth about their work, what they were trying to do, and what they think needs to be done and is being done wrong (and right) in the field today. One reader's opinion — but that's the kind of interview I like.

It was nice to see a letterer, a colorist, and **Gaiton** interviewed. Hope you'll do more of the same. As a writer, I'd like to find out more from people like this (from artists and inkers, too!) about what it's like to pick up a creative project in the middle and add to it, rather than starting with blank paper, as I do. I can't really conceive of what it's like. Also, I'd like to see interviews with either people who are now retired, like **Frank Robbins** and **Sol Harrison,** or people who have been the backbone of the industry for a long time, and aren't flashy enough to wow the fans. Craftsmen like **Jim Mooney, Frank Giacoia, Kurt Schaffenberger, Curt Swan, George Tuska, Don Heck** (!!!!), etc. And how about some comic-strip people? **Len Starr, Milton Caniff, Stan Drake, Archie Goodwin** (on strips exclusively), **Alex Kotzky** (or whoever's ghosting 3-G) and like that.

Anyway, thanks again, and good luck.

Kurt Busiek
120 Dell Street #2-W
Syracuse, NY 13210

Thanks for the kudos, Kurt — and the criticisms, as well. There's even a way to remedy your minor misgivings and add to our merits, all at the same time, merely by contributing some in-depth interviews of your own to COMICS INTERVIEW. We'd be happy to have such a perceptive and experienced comics enthusiast such as yourself among our contributing editors. How about it, Kurt?
— DAK

A SURE HIT

Dave,

Quite a neat book! Thanks for #1 and good luck on COMICS INTERVIEW's future. I think it will be a sure hit. If there's ever anything I can do, just call.

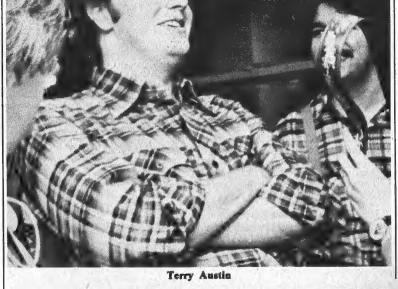
Greg LaRocque
Walden, NY 12586

THE MOST FUN

Dear David:

I toyed with the idea of doing this letter in an interview format, but you're going to get a lot of smart-asses responding, and no one's ever called me smart, so I'll restrain myself.

COMICS INTERVIEW, I must say in retrospect, having put it down about 11



Terry Austin

Jim Galton

minutes ago, is perhaps the most *fun* and just plain enjoyable comics-oriented publication I've read in a long time. I'm so used to gritting my teeth after reading a fan publication, either over bloody annoying pseudo-intellectual content or slip shod production values (I'm sensitive to things like that) that I find very little enjoyment in many of them these days. COMICS SCENE isn't bad, but they must be all things to all people because of their mass-market status and they often rehash things I already know. DAK's COMICS INTERVIEW (why does that sound like **Don Martin** dialogue?), on the other hand, is a very nicely packaged, unprepossessing, and generally modest publication. By modest, I imply that you are not attempting to overreach yourself, either by overestimating your potential effects on the fan market, or by attempting to provide an overcrowded genzine in a market already bursting with them (says the man who tries to publish a comics/sf/fantasy/pro-Canadian content fan magazine).

Generally your interviews were enlightening, pleasant, and most of all, lacking in some of the snide backbiting many people have come to associate with fan interviews of late. Personally, I get as much thrill as anybody else when I read the latest juicy gossip, but I've been finding that it often leaves a bad taste in my mouth, and is usually about as reliable as Polish news broadcasts. **Slifer** and **Giffen** have cleared up some points about the violence in OMEGA MEN, which I found distasteful in the extreme. Whatever their reasoning, though, it's not pleasant to be leafing through a comic book at breakfast-time and suddenly come across the awful scene where **Broot** literally tears a Gordanian in half, with a "Pop" sound effect, no less! I limit my opposite for English muffins rather rapidly. Another

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minor quibble I have with THE OMEGA MEN is that misuse of the terms "galaxy" and "star-system" which **Marv Wolfman** started and **Roger Slifer** seems to be continuing. A star-system is just that, a star with a family of orbiting planets. A galaxy is the larger body in which a star-system resides, with generally millions upon millions (everyone do their best **Carl Sagan** now) of the other star-systems, generally thousands of light years apart. To call Vega a star-system in one caption and a galaxy in the next is just sloppiness of the type that marred BATTLESTAR: GALACTICA and the TV version of BUCK ROGERS.

Well, I could go on about the specific content of the book, but I think you get the general gist of my feelings about it. One thing I will mention is my enjoyment of the non-mainline interviews. I've always been fascinated by things like logo design and printing procedures, and I appreciate the attestion paid to subjects of this nature. Speaking of logos: I've identified the origin of all the letters in your logo but one: The "I" is from ARCHIE, the "N" is from FANTASTIC FOUR, the "T" is from THOR, the "E" is from the old CAPTAIN AMERICA logo, the "R" is from the other THOR logo, the "V" is from the old AVENGERS logo, the "I" is from IRON MAN, and the "W" is from (I think) WEREWOLF BY NIGHT, but I can't for the life of me locate the second to last "E". Where's it from? (YOUNG LOVE, maybe?) **Jim Salicrup** was right, by the way, having your name as part of the title changes the focus in a positive way. It gives the book a more personal feel.

Well, take care, and best of luck with COMICS INTERVIEW. I'll be along for the ride.

Mark Shainblum
Editor/Publisher
ORION Magazine
Discovery Publications
5706 Merrimac Road
Montreal, Quebec
Canada H4W 1S6

About the logo, excluding the mysterious "E," you got most — but not all — of them right. Anyone else out there care to give it a shot?

And you don't know how good it makes us feel, Mark, that you found COMICS INTERVIEW to be "the most fun and just plain enjoyable comics-oriented publication" you've read in a while — because that's exactly what we want this magazine to be. We wouldn't be here if we didn't like comics — and neither would you.

Thanks again for the kind words, Mark — we appreciate 'em!

— DAK

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